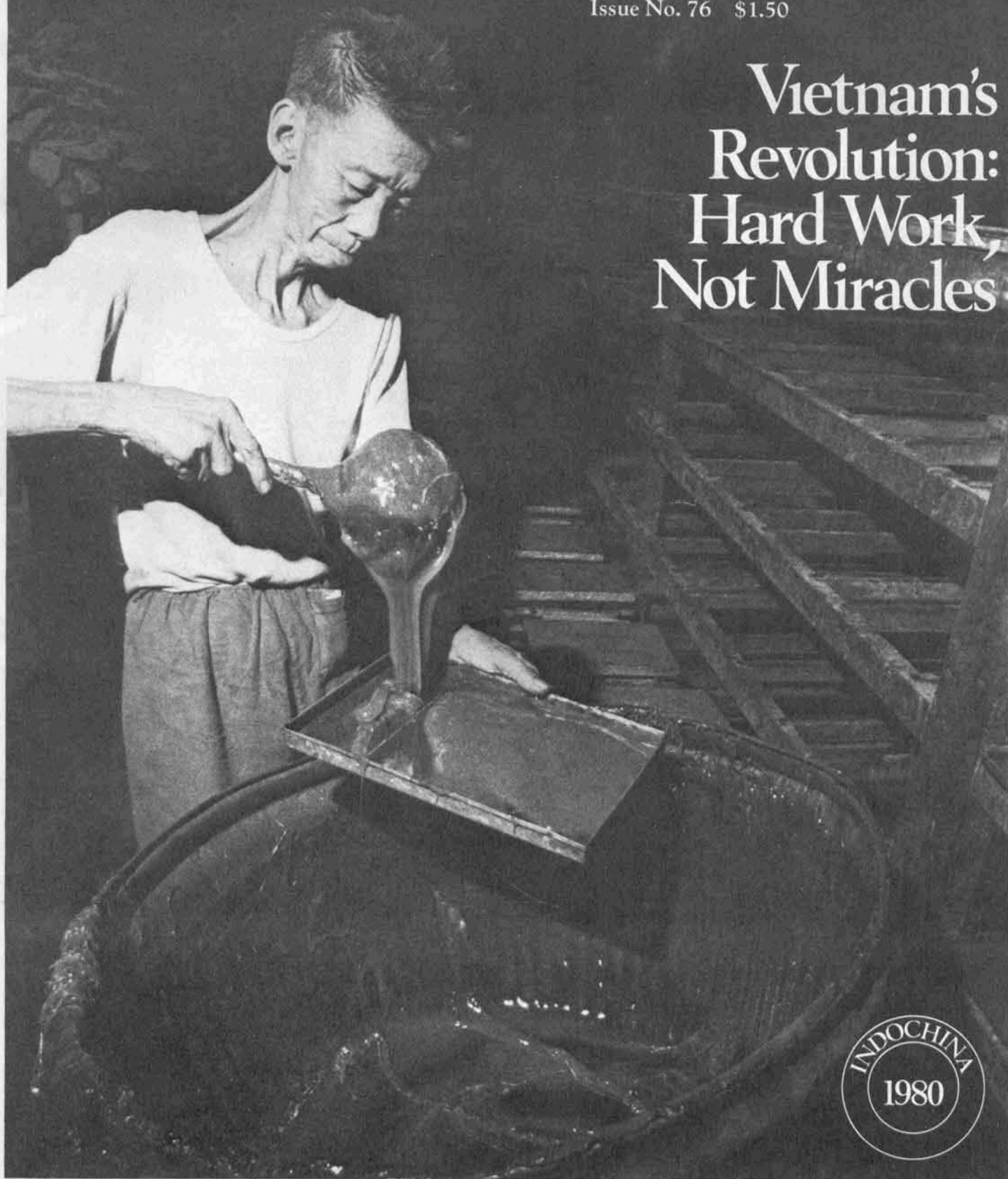


southeast
asia
CHRONICLE



Issue No. 76 \$1.50

Vietnam's Revolution: Hard Work, Not Miracles



INDOCHINA
1980

Vietnam's Revolution: Hard Work, Not Miracles

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Special Production Assistance from Typeset (typography); Inkworks (printing);
and California Trade Bindery (binding).
Graphic design and production by Bob Steiner.

Front cover photo

The glue pot, making use of the last scraps at a Ho Chi Minh City leather factory.
by John Spragens, Jr.

A Note from The Staff:

We have reprinted some of the newspaper articles our Indochina watcher John Spragens, Jr. wrote about his trip to Vietnam this summer. The articles include some information not covered in this issue of the *Chronicle*, such as Vietnamese attitudes toward China and Kampuchea. If you would like a set of these reprints, please do this: Put a 28-cent stamp on a legal size envelope, address it to yourself, and send it to us along with an extra 50 cents (stamps are OK) to cover printing costs. Just tell us you want the "Vietnam reprints."

The *Chronicle* does not include a letters column. This does not mean we don't like to hear from you! But because each issue is, in effect, an extended pamphlet on a particular topic, and because most of our readers are not regular subscribers, we've never included letters. We *do* appreciate your comments and criticisms, though, and try to send out at least a brief response to all the letters we receive. So think of us when you do your letter writing. The feedback will help our work.

We are considering the possibility of an issue in the next year or so about what has happened to Indochinese refugees since they left their home countries, especially what has happened to those now in the United States. If you find clippings on the subject in your local newspapers, please send us copies. And if you know anyone who has done a study—scholarly or journalistic—whom we might want to contact, do let us know.

The Resource Center Staff

Staff members are Rachael Grossman, Santi Mingmongkol, Joel Rocamora, John Spragens, Jr., and Martha Winnacker. Research Assistance is provided by Glenda Pawsey and Lynn Duggan.

The Southeast Asia Resource Center

Formerly called the Indochina Resource Center, the SRC is a major non-governmental source of information on current developments in the countries of Southeast Asia, and on the U.S. involvement there. The Center follows and interprets events in Vietnam, Laos and Kampuchea, as well as in Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines. This research and analysis continues in the tradition of the Indochina Resource Center, which played a key role from 1971 to 1975 as one of the sources of accurate information for the anti-war movement's successful effort to cut U.S. aid to the Thieu regime.

Subscriptions

The *Southeast Asia Chronicle* is published six times a year. Subscriptions are: \$10 regular; \$8 low-income; \$15 institutions; \$12 foreign surface mail; \$17 foreign air mail or domestic first class; \$25 sustaining.

All contributions are tax-exempt.

About This Issue

Traveling to Vietnam has its frustrations, but it provides real insights into what life is like.



John Spragens, Jr.

The body of the white Mercedes was beginning to show its age, but the engine still purred as our driver—a veteran of the Ho Chi Minh Trail—dodged through the trucks and cars, the bicycles and fuming motorcycles of Saigon and Cholon, past the vast bus terminal at the western edge of the city, and turned south on Highway 4.

The fields on both sides of the broad strip of American-laid asphalt were a lush green, tinged with the gold of ripening grain. The air was warm with the wet heat of a tropic summer. Thu Phong reached over as he drove and switched on the radio, which was tuned to the Ho Chi Minh City station. Out came the strains of a Borodin dance. No one in the car, I'm quite sure, realized that for me the words to the melody were those of "Stranger in Paradise." It was one of those small, pleasant surprises which punctuated my trip to Vietnam in August 1980.

Vietnam is not a paradise today, despite the richness of sections of the countryside. Nor was I entirely a stranger. This visit gave me my first opportunity to visit the North, but I had lived for three years in Saigon and the Mekong Delta. The trip was something of a homecoming after five and a half years.

I was, naturally, eager to see many old friends. This must be a frustration to the Vietnamese officials who make arrangements for foreign visitors. Most of the people we foreigners knew in the past—even the more progressive among us—were bourgeois intellectuals. While these intellectuals still have a role to play, they are no longer at the center of the action as they were in the days of the urban protests against the United States and the succession of U.S.-supported Saigon regimes. Officials are primarily interested in having foreigners meet with those who are at the center of the action *today*—the cadre of the new government. This is understandable.

It is frustrating, though, when all the meetings with old friends are telescoped into a few short group sessions, and always with a cadre from the Foreign Ministry or the city Foreign Affairs Office in the next chair. What official Vietnam does not seem to appreciate is the fact that, among the dwindling number of people with an active interest in Vietnam, a major motivation is personal friendships formed during the war years. If those friendships are choked off, much of the remaining American interest in Vietnam will die at the same time.

Naturally, as a reporter blowing into town after a long time away, I wanted more than anything to sit down for some long, private conversations with the people I had known best in the past. That doesn't mean that I would have taken everything they said at face value. But since I had once spent long hours, week in and week out, talking with them about everything from the world situation to their families, I would know what to make of their opinions. I could not be so sure of my evaluation of what I heard in interviews with officials I had never met before.

The criticism must be tempered. From long practice in the old days, many of the friends I did meet are quite skilled in speaking between the lines. And some government officials are more sensitive than others. At least one special meeting was added to my schedule at the last minute to compensate for an earlier session where discussion had been inhibited by the presence of unfamiliar cadre.

There were also surprises the night I went walking through the streets of Tan Dinh, the section of Saigon where I had lived in 1974, with Tran Ngoc Thach, my Foreign Ministry escort. We stuck our heads in the little restaurant where I used to eat, and found that the same ethnic Chinese family was still running

it. The menu was essentially the same, but with meals selling for about \$2, it was no longer a favorite with cyclo drivers. Now most of the patrons are private traders.

I should insert a note here about exchange rates. In this issue we have converted Vietnamese *dong* into dollars at the rate of three to one. This is the rate given to tourists and other visitors. The official commercial rate is two *dong* per dollar. In compiling official statistics on per capita income, the government uses yet another rate, of four *dong* per dollar. On the black market, it takes about 10 *dong* to buy a dollar.

As Thach and I continued our walk, we passed the house where I had rented a room from the wife of a Saigon officer. To my surprise, Thach suggested that I ring the bell and see if she

There is an odd tension between openness and suspicion.

still lived there. I had heard that no visits were permitted unless they were arranged by the government, and that Vietnamese needed special permits to receive foreign visitors in their homes. My old landlady was still there, not renting out any rooms now, and making her living by trading on the open market. She showed no embarrassment when she said, with Thach sitting just across the coffee table, that her husband had left illegally in 1979 and that a daughter was now living in Canada, having left legally.

It also must be said that the official schedule for my visit was arranged very efficiently. I had asked to take a look at the economic situation and plans for economic development, with an emphasis on the agricultural base of the economy. The list of requests I had made could have filled a three-month itinerary, but a representative cross-section was chosen, and the length of the visit was stretched from two to nearly three weeks.

Every foreign visitor reports a different set of pleasures and frustrations. Some have had long private discussions with old friends, for example. Some are taken only to showcases, like the Le Minh Xuan new economic zone, whereas I went farther out, to a zone just being opened for production. People see some of the same things, but they also go to different places, depending on their particular interests and hosts.

Sara Rosner, an American living in Canada, spent three months in Vietnam last year, visiting the country with her Vietnamese husband. We have included her account of their visit to the family home in Phan Thiet and descriptions of two people she met elsewhere in the country.

Christine White, an American scholar now living in Britain, visited Vietnam to do research with the help of professional colleagues at the Economics Institute. Two vignettes from her visit to Le Minh Xuan illustrate the contrasting reactions of people from various backgrounds to the "frontier" life.

We have also taken an excerpt from another trip account, that of Erich Wulff, head of the German-Vietnam Friendship Association, in early 1979.



Children in Ho Chi Minh City.

John Spragens, Jr.

Le Hong Tam of the Economics Institute elaborated on some aspects of Vietnam's policies toward industrialization and toward general economic development in an interview during my trip in August this year. We have selected some of the most interesting parts for this issue of the *Chronicle*.

And we are taking a second look at the question of ethnic Chinese who left Vietnam, following up the background information we presented a year ago in issue 68. Besides interviews I conducted in Vietnam, we have drawn on refugee interviews by **Rewi Alley** and **Charles Benoit**, conducted in China and Hong Kong.

There are sidelights to every trip which refuse to fit neatly into any article, but which you hate to see forgotten, or at best buried in your notebooks. Things like hearing, from my hotel room in Hanoi, the sound of a music group practicing in someone's home. Where they got the money for electric guitars in austere Hanoi, I don't know, but there they were.

In Saigon, a few blocks from where coffee houses blared out Western rock from expensive stereos, a young man was sitting on the sidewalk selling reed flutes. He was playing the folk-influenced tune to "Quang Binh, My Homeland," a wartime song from the North. Down in the Delta, there was more music—a traveling show troupe at the school grounds in Bac Lieu, whose repertoire included "House of the Rising Sun."

I asked about a well known musician from the old Saigon anti-war movement, Trinh Cong Son, and was told that he was at his home in Hue. Later, I learned that he had been in Saigon the whole time I was there, and that friends had visited with him. What was I to make, then, of requests to visit some Saigon intellectuals, turned down because the people were "not in town" or my hosts "didn't know how to contact them"?

On the other hand, mimeographed sheet music on sale in Saigon was dominated by sentimental Western love songs, and even included a booklet of songs by Pham Duy, a veteran of the Viet Minh who later joined Nguyen Van Thieu's anti-communist propaganda apparatus, then fled to the United States.

There is an odd tension between freedom and control in Vietnam today, between openness and suspicion. The closest it is possible to come to a generalization is this: Vietnamese leaders seem very willing to talk, at least in general terms, about problems they feel they have figured out and at least begun to solve. They also welcome free-swinging debate on foreign policy issues like Kampuchea, where they know that many foreigners, including friends of Vietnam, have serious disagreements with them.

They don't harp on old issues like war damage. They aren't

Normalization is still a goal to work for.

trying to make American visitors feel guilty. I was not taken to see a single bomb crater—and would have seen none in three weeks except that I noticed Vietnamese passengers on a flight to Hanoi looking out the window at a cluster of them scarring the landscape. The young cadre in Minh Hai province who lost an arm in the war shows no bitterness, says nothing about what the American occupation of his country cost him. His empty sleeve must speak for itself.

But officials are suspicious of uncontrolled contact between Vietnamese and foreigners. They don't worry about casual chit-chat at a coffee shop, but they do try to prevent extended private talks, and friends tell me this applies to Russians as



Army officer from the North takes his son to visit relatives in the Mekong Delta.

much as to Americans. Many officials also hesitate to give much detail about specific abuses of power by cadre; they prefer to speak in general terms. And they seldom say much about problems they are still trying to analyze; they'd rather speak positively about how they are solving the problems they have already figured out.

On balance, though, it is very satisfying to visit Vietnam today. It gives a sense of how the people live and cope which cannot be matched by even the most careful monitoring of news reports. Equally important, it gives the opportunity to let the Vietnamese know how people on the outside see them.

We continue to believe that normal relations between the United States and Vietnam would work to the benefit of all of Southeast Asia.

There should be no mistake: the United States has not disengaged from Indochina; it is still very much involved, and in a way which heightens tensions. American officials have been very blunt about their desire to hurt Vietnam. This policy must be reversed.

A change in American policy would not solve Vietnam's problems, but it would give that country a better atmosphere to work toward its own solutions.

We hope the time will soon come when there are normal diplomatic relations between our countries and Americans and Vietnamese can more easily visit each other. In the meanwhile, we hope that my observations and those of our other contributors will give you a clearer picture of what is happening in Vietnam now, five years after the country gained its political independence.

—John Spragens, Jr.

THE WAY IT WAS

John Spragens, Jr.

Critics of Vietnam today forget the disastrous conditions in the South before 1975—and the problems facing any government there.



Van Bao/VNA

April 30, 1975. Revolutionary soldier answers the questions of Saigon youth.

John Spragens is the Southeast Asia Resource Center's Indochina specialist. He lived in Vietnam for a total of three years between 1966 and 1974 and is fluent in Vietnamese. He returned to Vietnam in August 1980.

"**N**amnesia." A University of Texas student leader coined the term in 1976, describing the race to forget the experiences of the Vietnam war and ignore the lessons we as a nation should have drawn from those experiences. It was a particularly apt term. Its author is now apparently suffering from his own disease. He is a Navy pilot.

Now that Namnesia has taken hold, the debate is coming back to life—minus the needed memory of what actually happened in Vietnam.

Richard Nixon writes in his most recent book *The Real War*: "We had won the war militarily and politically in Vietnam. But defeat was snatched from the jaws of victory because we lost the war politically in the United States." He apparently says this with a straight face, and the statement is part of excerpts serialized in newspapers around the country as if they were a serious analysis of the world situation.

Joan Baez insists in a letter circulated to some people in the peace movement: "I want to go to the root of the problem, which is *no longer* what the United States, or France, or Japan, or floods and famine, or Pol Pot are doing in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. It is 1980 and the root of the problem is a totalitarian government in Hanoi . . ."

Times are bad in Vietnam. But too many discussions these days seem to assume that Vietnam began to exist only in 1975. Or they sketch pre-1975 Vietnam as they wish it had been, with scant reference to reality.

In July 1974 I visited Quang Ngai, a province town on the central coast, and spent several hours riding around the nearby countryside with a friend who lived there. About 20 minutes by Honda from town we stopped at a row of tiny thatched sheds huddled beside the road. The women and children who lived there hoped visiting foreigners might mean a chance for food. They were hungry.

A few steps from the back of their camp were rice fields colored a deep, healthy green. Across the road the scene was repeated. But these were not their fields. These women could not even get work as day laborers in the fields. Nor could they go back to their own homes. They pointed down the red dirt road, where it cut between two nearby hills. That's where their homes were, less than 10 miles away. The Paris Agreements, signed a year and a half earlier, guaranteed them the right to travel freely. "But if we went back, they'd shell us," the women said, referring to the troops of President Nguyen Van Thieu's Saigon regime. "They'd send soldiers to burn down our houses and arrest us."

They were not exaggerating. It had happened to others who returned home. The only way these women and their children could make any money was by scavenging for firewood in the mine-infested countryside. They might earn 50 cents a day, and had to make that do for food for an adult and three or four children.

Quang Ngai was a small, dusty town set in the middle of a chronically poor area of the country. Hunger was not totally incongruous there, though the refugee camps ringed with barbed wire seemed unnatural in any part of the country. The war had uprooted 100,000 people in the province—12 million in all of southern Vietnam at one time or another. Many of them were kept under armed guard in the camps for "refugees from communism" designed to dry up the sea of people which kept the guerrilla resistance alive.

What about Saigon, though? Saigon with its shop windows crammed with Japanese radios. Saigon with the glittering lights and hard rock music of dozens, perhaps hundreds of cozy bars



John Spragens, Jr.

Saigon, 1974

and night clubs. Saigon with its bell-bottom youth gossiping over ice cream and Cokes in air conditioned comfort at the Pole Nord. Saigon where life looked good and the efficient black market could turn up a jar of Smuckers cherry preserves on two days' notice.

That's the Saigon returning journalists so often use as their point of comparison. But few of those journalists knew even a smattering of Vietnamese. They missed the stories tucked away on inside pages of the newspapers about teenagers trying to poison themselves because of family problems, or families sharing a final meal of arsenic-laced rice gruel because they had reached the end of their financial rope.

The World Bank noticed. Not that they noticed the human details, but they did see how bleak the economic picture in the South was. In a report issued in January 1974—a report they intended to keep secret—a bank study mission concluded the Thieu regime would need at least \$11 billion in economic assistance through 1990 just to keep from losing ground.¹ Among the major points:

—Inflation in 1973 was 60 percent, and living standards were falling, “particularly among soldiers and government officials.”

—Nearly 50 percent of those gainfully employed were in the service sector, not in production, and 25 percent of the potential work force was unemployed.

—Saigon needed imports of 300,000 tons of rice per year for the parts of the South under its control.

—Per capita commodity output had fallen by more than 20 percent since the early sixties.

—Vietnamese who had money which could have been invested in local industry most often sent it abroad instead.

—Saigon's 1973 exports brought in only \$56 million—barely enough to cover seven percent of the bill for non-military imports of \$794 million.

There was little sign that things would improve. There had been grand schemes for postwar reconstruction and development, based on foreign investors who were supposed to be attracted by cheap labor. An industrial park was set up at Bien Hoa, site of the huge American air base. The Investment Service Center published a monthly newsletter and sponsored economic development seminars. They maintained an optimistic facade, but attracted little money. The most notable investors were Kubota, assembling tillers, and National, makers of Panasonic radios, assembling electronic products.

Total investment—domestic and foreign together—was not enough to keep pace with population increases. Foreign investors were wary because the war continued, with Thieu trying to establish control over all of southern Vietnam in direct contravention of the terms of the Paris Agreement. They were also put off by the corruption and bureaucracy they had to contend with in arranging investment projects.

The corruption which irritated foreign investors hit Vietnamese even harder. Bribes to get a job. Bribes to get a driver's license. Bribes to take a ferry across the Mekong. Bribes to sleep on the streets without being arrested. A chicken for soldiers passing through. Higher rice prices because rice truck drivers had to pay bribes to take their loads to market and because, for a price, police ignored hoarding and speculation by rice dealers.

By June 1974 the discontent began to break into the open, and from an unexpected quarter. Conservative Catholic priests, generally thought to be the most reliable supporters of whatever anti-communist regime was in power, formed the People's Movement to Save the Country and Create Peace. Their point: the corruption in the Saigon government was undermining the fight against the communists.

Watergate watching became an obsession in some quarters. It was clear that Nixon and Henry Kissinger would give Thieu as much support as Congress would allow—more, if they could find loopholes—and the phrase making the rounds in Saigon was “Nixon con, Thieu con”—“While Nixon stays, Thieu will stay.” The hope was it might work the other way as well.

The leading opposition newspaper, *Dien Tin*, started a reader poll to find out whether people believed Nixon would hang on to his office. Government censors quashed it. But Thieu's own paper, *Dan Chu*, followed Watergate reports as closely as the opposition did.

Just a month after Nixon's resignation, the anti-corruption movement took direct aim at Thieu and his family. They issued a blistering “Indictment No. 1” in which they charged: “The war which now continues to kill our troops and people is caused by the greed of Mr. Nguyen Van Thieu, who has considered his own position more important than the fate of the nation.”

The World Bank concluded Thieu would need \$11 billion in economic assistance.

By the end of September several new groups had made their appearance, among them the People's Front Against Starvation and the Committee to Protect the Rights of Workers, led by progressive Catholic priests and Buddhist monks. They mounted the first large street demonstrations since 1971 and attracted support from many ordinary working people. Within a month, though, police and riot-equipped troops had clapped an unsteady lid on these public manifestations of discontent.²

On the other side of the hazy political boundaries that divided southern Vietnam like a patchwork quilt, the Provisional Revolutionary Government was changing its tactics. For months after the Paris Agreements were signed in January 1973, the PRG had concentrated on regrouping and rebuilding. Frontline troops were pulled back for rest and training, and defense was turned over to local militia and regional forces. Where possible, people rebuilt their homes, and there was a stress on strengthening the spare but largely self-sufficient economy of the liberated zone.

In at least some parts of PRG territory, farmers were raising a surplus, which they traded for manufactured goods from the Saigon side. There was more trade with the North, too. When American bombers left the skies, army engineers had less trouble expanding the road network known in the West as the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and the roads were used for civilian as well as military purposes.

But as Saigon troops continued nibbling at the edges of the liberated zones, the orders to the liberation troops changed. First, they were authorized to strike back at encroaching Saigon units. Then, in October 1973, a general order gave permission for the revolutionary troops to counterattack—hitting Saigon units and bases involved in attacks against the liberated zone “at any time and at any place,” not simply in defense against direct attack.



Firewood scavenger in Quang Ngai province passes gate of destroyed school, 1974.

John Spragens, Jr.

For more than half of 1974 most PRG attacks remained defensive. Saigon troops would march unopposed into PRG territory, set up camp for the night, then find themselves surrounded as they settled down for dinner. There were frequent reports of battalion-sized losses.

The fighting continued to mount until early January 1975 when main force PRG units routed Saigon troops in Phuoc Long province, north of Saigon in a sparsely populated mountain region along the Kampuchean border. It was the first time Saigon had yielded an entire province without even a token attempt to retake the province capital. Though everyone played down the significance of the battle at the time—even the Ford administration—it later became clear that the outcome played an important role in decisions being made in Hanoi.

The “fall” or “liberation” of Phuoc Long came in the last days of a marathon meeting of the Vietnamese Communist Party's Political Bureau. (At the time it was known as the Workers' Party in the North and the People's Revolutionary Party in the South.) The collapse helped convince Vietnamese leaders that the United States would not intervene in the war again on a massive scale. The decision:

... in 1975 we would strike unexpectedly with large, wide-spread offensives, and create conditions to carry out a general offensive and uprising in 1976. ... if the opportune moment presents itself at the beginning or the end of 1975, we will immediately liberate the South in 1975.³

The beginning of the end for the Thieu regime was the battle for Buon Me Thuot in the Central Highlands. Saigon troops fled in disorder on March 16. Defenses elsewhere in the mountains and along the central coast began to collapse faster than the revolutionary troops could move forward. The only serious battle was at Xuan Loc northeast of Saigon. But resistance there was crushed and revolutionary troops swept into Saigon in time to celebrate May Day in the broad boulevard which ran from

Thieu's presidential palace past the American embassy to the city zoo.

Saigon greeted the liberation forces with a mixture of apprehension and excitement. The U.S. Embassy had capped its years of anti-communist propaganda with a package of stories—invented, as it turned out—about supposed atrocities in areas captured by the revolutionaries before they reached Saigon. Some Saigonese, already fearful enough, imagined an immediate bloodbath. Others hoped that, with Thieu gone, all the country's problems would be solved.

There was no bloodbath. But there were no miracles, either. Few people—among the people of the Saigon zone, among foreign observers, even among the Vietnamese communist leadership—realized how intractable the problems left behind by the war would prove. Fewer still were prepared for the new problems they would face—problems within the revolutionary ranks as well as problems with their socialist neighbors. □

NOTES

1. *Current Economic Position and Prospects of the Republic of Vietnam*, Report No. 315-VN, East Asia and Pacific Department, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, January 18, 1974. For a summary see *International Bulletin*, Vol. 1, No. 5, March 11-24, 1974.

2. For a more detailed review of the situation in 1974, see "Thieu vs. the People: a Match He Cannot Win" by John Spragens, Jr., *AMPO*, Vol. 7, No. 1, Winter 1975. Also *The Second Year of the Paris Agreement*, *Indochina Chronicle* No. 38, January-February 1975.

3. *Our Great Spring Victory*, by Gen. Van Tien Dung, Monthly Review Press, 1977, p. 25. This memoir, originally published in Vietnamese in 1976, is the best available account of the Vietnamese leadership's view of the end of the war. Two issues of the *Indochina Chronicle*, Nos. 42 and 44, give useful accounts of the period as seen through the eyes of sympathetic Westerners.



"I don't feel that we owe [Vietnam] a debt, nor that we should be forced to pay reparations at all. . . . The destruction was mutual. We went to Vietnam without any desire to capture territory or impose American will on other people. We went there to defend the freedom of the South Vietnamese. I don't feel that we ought to apologize or castigate ourselves or to assume the status of culpability."

—President Jimmy Carter, March 24, 1977

"To put it in terms of a Chinese dialectic, United States policy is exactly to squeeze Vietnam as hard as we can, to force Vietnam to rely on the Soviet Union; then Vietnam will find that the Soviet Union cannot meet all of its needs. . . . If Vietnam experiences economic hardship, I think that's just great."

—Roger Sullivan, National Security Council staff, December 1979

"For too many years we have lived with the Vietnam syndrome. . . . It is time that we recognized that ours was, in truth, a noble cause. A small country, newly free from colonial rule, sought our help in establishing self-rule and the means of self-defense against a totalitarian neighbor bent on conquest."

—Ronald Reagan, campaigning for president, August 18, 1980



Our Great Spring Victory

An Account of the Liberation of South Vietnam

By Gen. Van Tien Dung (Now Minister of Defense of Vietnam)

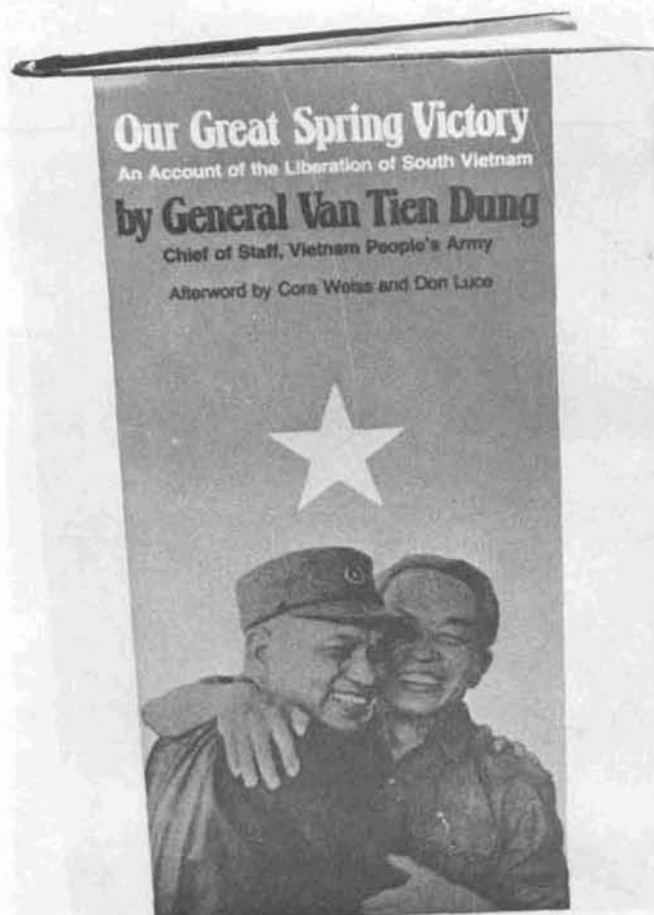
Translated by John Spragens, Jr.

"Van Tien Dung emerges from this book as a no-nonsense campaign commander preoccupied with concrete results, rather uncomfortable with political pontifications, and often impatient with decision-making by means of endless conferences. His mission was to design and construct a war machine of unprecedented proportions, to deceive the enemy as to when and where that machine would be launched, to mount a successful assault, and then to keep moving so fast that the enemy would never be able to regroup and counterattack. The historical outcome is well known Dung is surprisingly candid about himself and many of his comrades. In fact, this is probably the most revealing portrait of Vietnam's revolutionary leadership yet published."

—David G. Marr, Pacific Affairs



Spragens with Gen. Dung



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LOOKING AHEAD

John Spragens, Jr.

The Vietnamese are looking ahead and trying new tactics against the problems that make their reconstruction so difficult.

Vietnam today is looking forward, not back. Conversations are more likely to turn to Resolution Six than to the aftermath of war. "Resolution Six" is shorthand for the resolution passed in July of 1979 by the sixth plenum of the Communist Party central committee. Resolution Six is no instant cure for the problems of Vietnam, but it is more than mere snake oil. It gives the highest official sanction to a new flexible approach to the country's economic woes. And in so doing, it offers a hope for easing some major related difficulties.

Vietnam is not feeding itself. In this the country is far from unique in the world, but there can be no self-sustained growth of the sort Vietnamese leaders have in mind until the food problem is solved.

The first post-war five year plan—for 1976-1980—called for the food problem to be solved by this year, at least on a basic level. Planners saw a crop of 18 million tons of unhulled rice, or

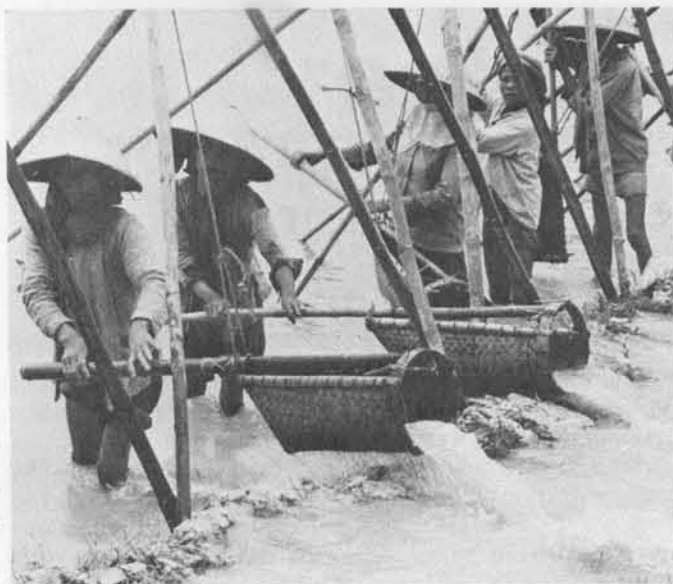
paddy, plus other staples equivalent to three million tons of paddy. The 21 million tons were to provide enough for domestic consumption, with a small surplus for export.

After the first year of the plan, prospects looked good. The total production of staples was 13.6 million tons, a dramatic rise from the 1975 figure of 11.6 million tons. Minister of Agriculture Vo Thuc Dong said at the time that average yearly increases of eight percent in the rice crop would be enough to meet the goal. The output of other staples—corn, manioc, potatoes and sorghum—would have to quadruple in five years.

Increases in secondary staples have kept up the pace, but that is about the only area of agricultural production that is on target. Rice production fell in 1977 and again in 1978. In 1978 the country had to import nearly a million and a half tons of staples—mostly wheat and wheat flour. Livestock and poultry were stagnant. When 1979 production was added up, the staple crop was only marginally higher than that of 1976. It was a



John Spragens, Jr.



recovery, but not enough to keep up with a population increasing at the rate of a million a year.

The goal for 1980 was scaled down to 15 million tons—barely enough to maintain the country's tight rations. It now seems unlikely even that goal will be met.

In Ha Bac province in early August part of the problem was clear. Typhoon Joe had ripped through Hai Phong and on to Ha Bac more than a week before, dropping 20 inches of rain in three days. Fields already planted with winter rice—the main crop of the year—became lakes. In more than a hundred places, river waters rose above the level of the dikes, built and maintained by generations of farmers in the northern delta, which are supposed to protect the paddies. Waves whipped up by the winds and water rising up through the ground threatened the dikes. Six-inch cracks appeared as sections of the dikes slumped back toward the fields.

"We had to mobilize all our forces," says Tong Van Suong, who was in charge of the province's efforts to combat the flood. "In about 10 days, working non-stop, we were able to save the whole dike system."

There can be no self-sustained growth until Vietnam feeds itself.

Even though it was late in the season and any delay might make it too late for replanting the rice fields, the dikes had to come first. The operation required 72,000 sandbags and extensive latticeworks of bamboo poles.

Draining the fields came next. The province has enough pumps for ordinary irrigation, but not for flood control. Many of the pumps they had were not working, in part because the typhoon had toppled hundreds of power poles. Teams 150 strong—mostly women, joined by children 12 and older—set up long rows of Vietnam's traditional "pumps." Woven bamboo baskets dipped into the flooded rice paddies, scooped up a gallon of water, two gallons of water, and flung it across the dike into the canal leading to the river. Time after time, in an uneven assortment of tempos, the scoops of water splashed into the canal all morning long, and again all afternoon. But the

efforts of a team of 150 were insignificant compared to what one pump could have done—if enough pumps were available and if there had been enough electricity for them.

In fields already drained, the back bending work of transplanting rice seedlings, one at a time in careful rows, had begun for a second time. The work teams of three and four and five were mostly women, and they laughed and joked together about all the attention they were attracting from foreign visitors.

Typhoon Joe was an early storm. The province expects floods in August and September, after the rice plants are larger and better able to stand up to winds and water, but not in July. Their expectations were not disappointed. Flying back into Hanoi in late August I could see flood waters covering an even greater area than they had when I'd left for the South a week and a half earlier. The fringes of another typhoon had dropped rains so heavy they sent water racing waist high through the streets of Hanoi. Then in September typhoon Ruth ripped across six provinces south of Hanoi, killing at least 134 people, destroying tens of thousands of homes, and endangering still more of the rice crop.

This makes the fourth year in a row that Vietnam has been hit by "abnormally" severe weather. In 1977 it was droughts; in 1978, floods; in 1979, too little sun. There has been little outside relief assistance. Buying food to cover the shortfall cost perhaps \$500 million in 1979. That is money Vietnam does not have, so the purchases impose serious strains on a precarious balance of payments. Self-sufficiency in food is not just a long





John Spragens, Jr.

Flooded rice fields in Ha Bac province.

term problem. It is urgent, and government planners give it top priority, on the same plane as reducing unemployment to a reasonable level.

In broad outline, the food picture will be this: The northern delta, with good organization and careful management, will feed itself. Central Vietnam, the northern mountains and the cities will be food deficit areas. The Mekong Delta in the South must make up the difference.

Central Vietnam, where the long chain of mountains linking the three countries of Indochina pushes down, in places, all the way to the sea, has always been the worst part of the country for farming. The strip of arable land is narrow, and overall it is less fertile than land in the northern and southern river deltas. On top of that, central Vietnam—the sections both north and south of the old North-South boundary—suffered most heavily from the war.

Around Vinh Linh, there are no trees older than 1975.

The present day province of Binh Tri Thien straddles the former border. Every summer monsoon winds from India cross the peninsula, dropping their rains in Laos, then sweeping with parching heat over Binh Tri Thien and neighboring provinces. Mountain forests which moderate the heat were destroyed in many places by a combination of bombing and defoliation. As a result, summer temperatures which once were in the upper 80s and low 90s now reach well into the 100s. In the rainy season, the loss of the old forests means that water runs through the soil much more rapidly, since the roots of the young new trees hold less water.

In the Vinh Linh area, just north of the old demilitarized zone, there are no trees older than 1975, according to

Dr. Nguyen Khac Vien, head of Vietnam's Foreign Languages Publishing House. And in 1975, the tallest trees were barely a foot high. Eventually the forests will recover, but the process will take decades. Meanwhile the yearly cycle of drought and flood, always more severe in the central provinces than elsewhere in the country, will be worse than ever.

While the central provinces will probably always be a food deficit area, they and the mountains which ring the northern delta will sooner or later make significant contributions to the country's economy. The mountains are well suited to cash crops like coffee, tea and pepper as well as forestry, and if there is enough fertilizer, many areas can grow varieties of vegetables which are not suited to the hotter lowlands. The southern part of central Vietnam is also good for rubber plantations, and researchers are checking the area around the old U.S. Navy base at Cam Ranh for good cotton land.

The days when central Vietnam can hold its own are years in the future, though. Now many reports from the area are gloomy. Overseas Vietnamese who had visited relatives in Hue, the former imperial capital, said that after sharing one or two meals with their families, they insisted on eating at their hotel. Their families had to go hungry at other meals to set aside food for the meals they ate together. An old acquaintance in Saigon said the situation in the countryside near Hue is little better. A young man we both know had returned there from Saigon after the war, received land, joined a co-op and married. "They both work night and day, and it's barely enough to survive," my acquaintance said.

The situation in the fertile Mekong Delta is so different that it almost seems to be a separate country. Indeed that was the last-ditch proposal made in 1975 by Graham Martin, then the American ambassador to Saigon, as the Thieu regime was falling apart around him. He proposed writing off the lost central provinces, since they were an "economic deficit

area" anyway, and increasing American support for a Saigon government controlling little but the city and the delta.

Setting aside the political and military absurdity of the proposal—many of the revolution's earliest and strongest bases were in the delta—it would have created one of the wealthier nations in Southeast Asia. Where irrigation and drainage systems are in good repair, farms in the delta can produce abundant crops at any season.

During my trip south from Saigon along Route 4, everywhere families were busy with the harvest. In the fields and beside the roads they threshed rice in the ancient way, holding the stalks and beating the grain heads against a board. In a few places the labor was made easier by a simple threshing machine. The golden grain was spread along both sides of the asphalt roadway, forcing traffic into a single lane down the middle. The harvest looked good.

Meanwhile, in neighboring fields the plants were just beginning to head up with grain. And in other fields nearby, farmers were transplanting seedlings.

Most impressive of all, though, were the scenes deep in Minh Hai province, the province which reaches to the southern tip of the country. From the province town of Bac Lieu to Ca Mau my hosts and I drove along a badly neglected road. From there, the journey to the U Minh district office was by river boat.

In most places, rice seedlings were just being transplanted. Farmers were rowing small boats piled high with seedlings from the seed beds to their fields. It was an hour or more before I realized I had not seen any water buffalo—nor tractors, either. "How do they plow the fields?" I asked Ta Viet Hoa, deputy editor of the province newspaper. "They don't have to," he said. "Here, you just sow the rice and it grows." Looking down at the river, I could see why. It was black with silt. The river overflows into the rice fields and leaves behind its rich, natural fertilizer. Of 11 villages in the district, only three need any chemical fertilizer.

Many homes are built on the river, with front porches that double as boat docks. To one side of the porch there is usually a fishing net suspended over the river on a frame. It can be lowered into the water with a light shove on the long pole that see-saws over a supporting piling. It takes only a few minutes to gather a half dozen pan fish. Most homes seem to have small flocks of chickens, ducks and geese, and many have pigs, as often as not kept in lattice-bottomed pens built out over the river. Here and there people are building brick houses. But Hoa says many who could already afford to build with brick prefer thatch. It's cooler.

Between 1976 and 1979, the district opened up 5,000 acres of new farm lands, bringing the total to 20,000 acres. By the end of 1980 they hope to be planting 30,000. "When you clear new land here, you can immediately begin farming it with high productivity," says Cao Quan Tac, the district's information officer. The fields produce more than a ton of paddy per acre with only one crop each year—more than some parts of Vietnam can grow with two crops.

The natural abundance of the land is at once a blessing and a curse for the leadership in U Minh and elsewhere in the delta. With improved irrigation and drainage, more crops each year, fertilizer and machines for areas which need them, and better use of labor, the delta can cover the gap between current grain production and what is needed for a good diet for the country. A surplus for export is not a pipe dream.

The question is how to get the farmers to put out the extra effort. Before the reconsiderations which led to Resolution Six,

government leaders relied largely on appeals to patriotism when they asked farmers to sell their rice and produce to the state and when they urged them to join cooperatives. There was also at least some coercion. This is discussed, but mainly in the abstract. Provincial cadre do mention that there were cases where local cadre simply signed people up on co-op lists whether they had agreed or not. It is a tactic which may work to draft soldiers in war time, but when it is used in organizing cooperatives, it generates resistance.

In U Minh, and in other parts of the delta as well, the farmers' patriotism was beyond question. U Minh had been among the firmest revolutionary base areas since the days of Viet Minh resistance against the French. The farmers in U Minh had paid their dues. They also knew their local cadre well; it was not like an area formerly under Saigon control just learning how to deal with new leaders. When they disagree with plans put forward by the cadre, the people of U Minh do not hesitate to speak their minds. While they have contributed substantial amounts of grain to meet their state quotas, they have not yet formed any

"Here, you just sow the rice and it grows."

cooperatives. Two-thirds of them had been forced into "refugee" camps during the war, and the other third had to go to revolutionary bases deep in the forest. When the war ended, their first concern was to return to their old homes and try to rebuild their private lives.

Government planners had hoped all the Mekong delta would be in cooperatives by this year. In fact, only about 20 percent of the farmers have joined, and cadre pushing too hard to sign farmers up have created resentment in some areas. As a result, the government has officially cancelled the 1980 goal and put renewed emphasis on the three basic principles of cooperatives: They must be voluntary. They must be mutually advantageous. And they must have democratic management. Cadre now repeat the list several times as they discuss co-ops. Elaborating, they say the first stage in the process is to recruit a few families to set up a model operation. New organization and new farming methods are tested in these pilot projects, mistakes are ironed out. Then the results will be shown to neighboring farmers—by bringing them to the pilot project, or by organizing conferences in their own villages to explain the results of the models. Co-ops will have preference in receiving scarce fertilizer, oil and machinery, and will have more help from technical specialists than individual farmers.

"They need time to talk with the people, restudy their plans, then meet again," Vien explains. "The problem is to prepare each step carefully. It must not be too big. But if the process takes too long—20 years—that's too slow. If we move too slowly, the rich peasants will make more and buy up land from the poor peasants. If you are rich and you have a tiller and if I am old and my buffalo was killed in the war, I may have to sell you my land and hire out my labor. We cannot allow that."

Vien says that there was some land redistribution after liberation in 1975. The distribution was decided by village meetings. "The atmosphere then was very good," he says. "People were happy, and the rich people were somewhat afraid of the revolution."

After the early euphoria wore off, several problems became apparent. One of the major ones was the shortage of consumer goods. "If I've eaten my fill and can't buy 10 yards of cloth (the

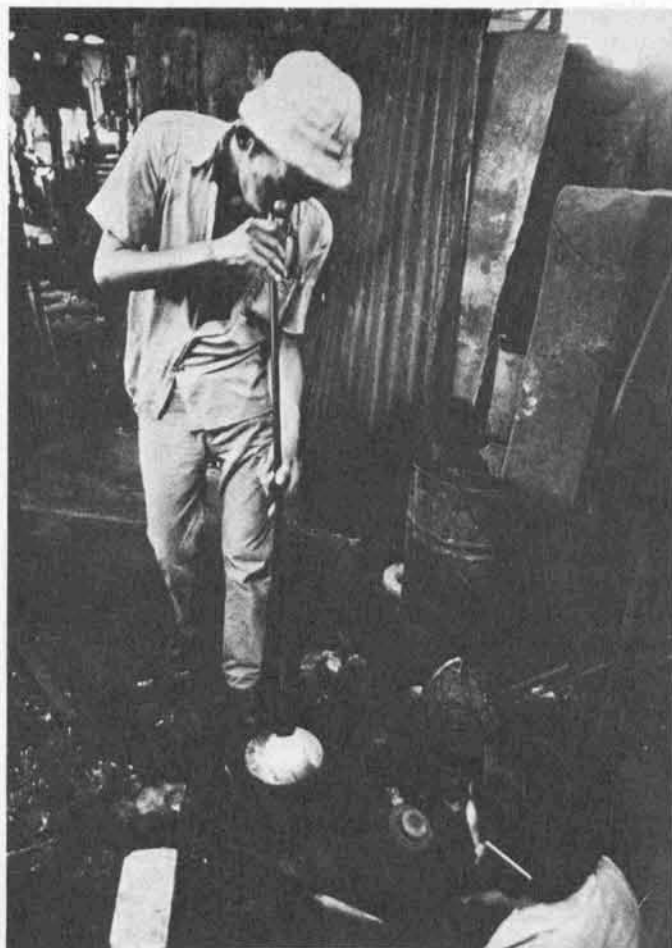
official ration is 5 yards per person per year), I'll say forget it, I won't work any more," Vien explains.

This is the reason it hurt so badly when China cut off aid to Vietnam in 1978. Though the total value of Chinese aid was not nearly so high as that from the Soviet Union, it supplied consumer goods Vietnam was not able to produce for itself—from electric fans and hot water flasks to soap. (China was also supplying nearly all of Vietnam's medicines.)

The consumer goods problem is one of the direct targets of Resolution Six. It encourages groups and individuals to set up small factories and handicraft workshops either to produce consumer goods for local consumption or to turn out export goods. In Saigon and Cholon, these factories are everywhere. Walking down the main streets in the center of town I see three women sitting inside what once was a bar, embroidering phoenixes on silk for export. In what once was a stationery and book shop, there are now a half dozen small metal stamping machines making parts for someone else to assemble. In other parts of town, on main streets and in back alleys, factories are producing kerosene lamps, leather, drinking glasses and plastic buckets. In some cases they are old factories started up after several years idle. In other cases the new factories have started with a few old imported machines, then made their own copies so they will have enough for a complete production line.



Making kerosene lamps in Ho Chi Minh City.



Glassware factory in Ho Chi Minh City.

Workers in these factories—usually organized as a cooperative with an elected management committee—make good wages for today's Vietnam. Where the average government cadre may make \$20 or \$25 a month, workers in co-op factories can make \$55 and more. Those in management positions or with technical skills sometimes make over \$100. Material incentives have been introduced in state industries as well. In a celebrated example, workers on one fishing crew have received bonuses for high production which push their average earnings to \$200 a month.

These factories will help soak up some of the unemployment and underemployment. Unemployment in Ho Chi Minh City alone is in the hundreds of thousands; nationwide it is about three million. This is an important goal in itself, but the output of consumer goods is equally needed for the country's economic health. The country especially needs consumer goods flowing into the state trading sector. To keep tabs on what the new factories are turning out, the government is now in the middle of a drive to register all the factories.

Many of the goods factories sell to the state will find their way down to the Mekong delta, where they will be an essential part of the rice purchase scheme implemented after Resolution Six. Until the resolution, the state took some rice as tax and purchased more at the official price. Any rice left over after a family's own needs and the state quotas were met could be sold on the free market. But since the free market price was often 10



Rivers are the main transportation routes in U Minh district.

times as much as the official price, a lot of rice slipped around the edges of the state collection network. Now an intermediate "negotiated price" has been introduced.

In Minh Hai province the structure works like this: About 13 to 15 percent of the harvest goes as taxes. The rate is different in other provinces, depending on the year's crop and how much of it is needed for the farmers themselves. The province will fill about a third of its quota through tax collections. The state will pay seven cents a pound for the next level—obligatory sales at the official price. The negotiated price will vary with place and season, averaging 19 cents a pound just after harvest and rising to about 34 cents a pound at the end of the crop. Province officials did not yet know just how much they would need to collect at each of these two prices, since this is the first year of the plan, but together they would make up the other two-thirds of the province's quota. Meanwhile free market buyers pay about 60 cents a pound.

The inducement to sell to the state at a lower price will be provided by the consumer goods, and by other scarce supplies like gasoline and fertilizer. In the majority of cases, sales of rice to the state will not be for cash, but will be barter for hard-to-get items. Press reports since I left Vietnam indicate that the system has been fairly successful. But U Minh district was one which had so far failed to meet its quota.

U Minh was a revolutionary base, but its farmers have not joined cooperatives.

Important though they may be, material incentives are not the whole answer to Vietnam's economic difficulties. Incompetence, corruption and suspicion have sapped the morale of many. And the problem is circular. Take corruption: One government worker in the delta—a young man who had worked for the revolution for years during the most difficult part of the war—said his salary of \$25 a month simply was not enough, even though it is higher than many government salaries. He



and his co-workers have now been given land to grow their own vegetables after hours, and they have started raising pigs. Still, about once every two months he gets extra supplies of food from his parents on the farm. It's enough for him to get by, but not enough for him to think of starting a family. That, he says, is why so many government workers find "outside" ways to make extra money. Judging from criticisms appearing in the press, the "outside" income often comes from bribes or from pilfering state supplies.

In theory, the low state wages are supposed to be adequate because state workers can buy basic items like food and cloth at reduced prices. In fact, the state supply system is too weak to meet that responsibility. The government is now discussing adjustments in the salary and price structure to give its own workers a fairer shake, but there is no indication how long it will be before the idea moves beyond the discussion stage. Meanwhile poverty breeds corruption, which in turn makes it more difficult to meet the needs of the people.

Corruption is a major target of the recent drive to reorganize the party. Individual party members and party branches as well are being evaluated to see whether they are qualified to play the leading role the party is supposed to have. "Many party branches have expelled unqualified people from the party and corrected their mistakes and shortcomings," the party paper *Nhan Dan* said in a September 20 editorial, "and through that they have strengthened good relations between the party and the people." It continued, "... those degenerate backsliders who have stolen, taken bribes, coerced the masses must be expelled from the ranks of the vanguard of the revolution." The party reform drive began early this year, and it has not yet solved the problem of corruption. But the drive is far from over. In the same editorial *Nhan Dan* reported less than 30 percent of the party's membership has been awarded party cards so far. Only 34 percent of the party branches have been certified.

Corruption has hit the North as well as the South. The political impact was most harmful in the South, where it undermined efforts to win people's confidence in the new regime. The difficulty was compounded when some leaders installed by the new government did not measure up to the requirements of their jobs.

The problem of incompetence has several roots. "Cadre who only know about fighting now have to tackle problems in economics," says Dr. Vien. "But if you're 40 years old, it's hard to study math." In bluntly worded articles, top party leaders like Le Duc Tho have said people should no longer be elected to leadership committees simply because of their war time exploits, or because no one wanted to hurt their feelings. In the September 1979 issue of the party theoretical journal *Tap Chi Cong San*, writing under the pseudonym Trung Thanh, he stressed the need for people with technical and managerial skills and the need to bring more young people and more women into the leadership. "There are still people who think it is 'inconvenient' to let young cadre and women cadre lead. It is not right to think this way," he said, calling the attitude "feudal and conservative."

In the South trained cadre were a prime target of U.S. counterinsurgency programs with the result, according to Vien, that as many as 90 percent of the cadre were killed. In the famous Mekong delta village of Ap Bac, five party secretaries were killed between 1968 and 1975. The current secretary is number six.

This means Vietnam needs a massive training program for new leaders to gain the skills it needs to build the economy. At Hanoi's Noi Bai airport, I met a group of 150 high school graduates from every province in the country who were waiting for a special flight that would take them to the Soviet Union for five year programs of study in various technical fields. More hundreds go every year, and others study in Vietnam's own polytechnic colleges and specialized high schools. But the process of training this new leadership generation will be a long one.

Meanwhile, mutual suspicions have prevented Vietnam from making the best use of technical skills already available among members of the old Saigon elite. The excerpt from Erich Wulff's book (p. 19) brings the problem out vividly. Understandably, the revolutionaries did not think the Saigon intellectuals would be politically reliable. But instead of finding some way to make use of their technical skills while keeping them under political control, the new leaders left many of these intellectuals on the sidelines, where they grew bored and disillusioned.

It is true, of course, that many of the old Saigon elite did not have the kinds of skills Vietnam needs now. As Hoang Tung, editor of *Nhan Dan*, says: "The Ph.D.s in Saigon are mostly doctors and lawyers. The economists mainly know about commerce. There are few technicians. There are 10,000 people who are professors and lawyers and writers, but few who could manage a factory. . . . It's easier to be a government minister



Tilling fields in the mountains of central Vietnam.

George Cohen

than it is to be a factory director. There's no one there who could direct the building of a large generating plant or direct oil exploration."

The early 1979 discussion within the party discussed in Wulff's article led to an easing of the government's attitude and eventually to Resolution Six.

The atmosphere for old Saigon intellectuals changed in 1979.

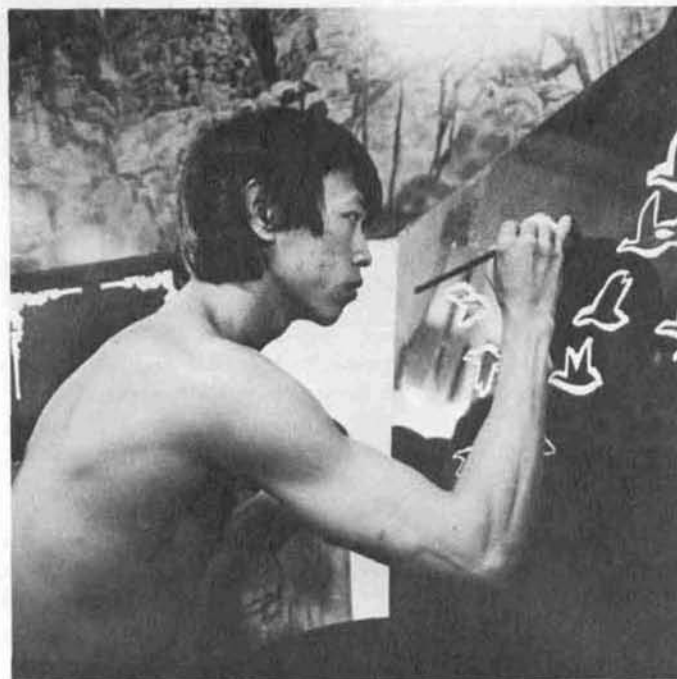
One of those who decided to test the government's new openness to ideas from the "old people" was Nguyen Xuan Oanh, an economist trained in Japan and the United States. (He was known to some American friends as Jack Owens. Rumors making the rounds of the Vietnamese refugee community said he had committed suicide, but I found him quite alive, indeed in robust health.) Oanh worked for three years as a senior economist for the International Monetary Fund and held several cabinet posts in Saigon in the period of merry-go-round governments which followed the 1963 assassination of President Ngo Dinh Diem. On his resumé there is a blank between 1975 and 1979.

Oanh says the atmosphere for the old Saigon intellectuals began to change in early 1979, and since then he has been offering pointed but constructive criticism of government economic policies. His first paper, "Restructuring Our Foreign Trade Policy," was serialized in *Dai Doan Ket*, the magazine of the Vietnam Fatherland Front. In gentle terms, it attacked Vietnam's harum-scarum approach to exports, and said the country needed to do a market study to see where it had the greatest relative advantage, then concentrate on those types of production. Oanh says he expects the study will show the advantage lies with agricultural and craft products.

Among the other points he made in the foreign trade paper is the need for representatives of factories to take part in exploring markets and negotiating contracts, rather than leaving everything to foreign trade bureaucrats from Hanoi. This would help eliminate the problem of export goods being returned because they were not what the buyer ordered. When this has happened, individual factories and workshops have been responsible for selling or otherwise disposing of the rejects on the home market, and the government has not underwritten their financial loss. Having factory representatives involved in negotiations would also help avoid underpricing Vietnamese labor. Oanh cites the case of a contract for denim jacket-slacks outfits which allowed only \$1.50 to cover production costs for each suit.

This paper has been taken very seriously, and Oanh is part of a team drawing policies based on many of the points he raised. With that success behind him, he has more recently tackled monetary policies in a paper published by the private Ho Chi Minh City daily *Tin Sang*.

Oanh says the cash-only economy is hobbling development, especially since the government doesn't print enough money. One result is that even government agencies sometimes go three or four months without paying their employees because they simply do not have the cash to give them. Government salaries are so low they offer no chance of savings, so when workers are not paid, it must have disastrous effects on morale. Because of the cash crunch, managers of units which take in cash—stores and theaters, for example—tend to sit on piles of



John Spragens, Jr.

Tin Sang lacquerware workshop, Ho Chi Minh City.

money so they can be sure they will have enough to pay their own employees. This compounds the problem.

This paper has generated heated discussion, and Oanh says he has had a number of requests from leaders at the highest levels in Hanoi for copies. He is taking things one step at a time but, he says, "My head is still on my shoulders." He calls publication of these papers a "gamble," and says other Saigon intellectuals are waiting to see if it pays off. "They have hesitated to speak up because they were afraid of saying the 'wrong' thing," Oanh explains.

Some of Oanh's friends have been encouraged by the serious consideration his papers have received, but other intellectuals are less optimistic. "We just do what we have to to get by," one says in a brief snatch of private conversation. For yet others, the new flexibility has come too late; they have already left the country.

It sometimes seems the government is moving in opposite directions at the same time. While some "old people" are being encouraged to offer critical analyses of official policies, there have been constant calls during the last year for people to remain vigilant and protect the country from sabotage. In part, the calls for people to guard the social and political order are efforts to involve them in fighting corruption and pilferage. But they are also efforts to combat armed resistance to the government.

The province newspaper in Minh Hai carried a report in its August 15 issue about a man named Tran Quang Sang, tried as the ringleader of the local branch of a counterrevolutionary army commanded from Saigon, which reached into all areas of the South. "In the South they were organized into five army corps. Each army corps consisted of four divisions and was responsible for one 'tactical' zone as in the period when the Americans and puppets were temporarily in control. Each division had four regiments at the province level, with battalions at the district level and companies at the village level," the paper

reported. Sang was the commander of the K3 tactical zone, which included the major towns of Chuong Thien, Soc Trang, Bac Lieu and Ca Mau.

After Sang's capture, the paper continued, the central command of the movement, in Saigon, reestablished contact with other leaders in the area. "In just a short time they developed a force of nearly 100 and developed a military command network throughout the K3 tactical zone." Their goal: to erode the people's confidence in the government and seize power.

The paper says the whole organization, from Binh Tri Thien to Minh Hai, was rounded up by security forces and brought to justice. Sang was sentenced to death by a provincial court.

In four days traveling by car and boat in the delta, I saw no hint of any serious military challenge to the government, though one night in Bac Lieu I did hear some gunshots which officials could not or would not explain. In the Central Highlands, though, there are continuing security problems. Roads are sometimes cut, imposing extra hardship on a region which has a rather poor transportation network anyhow. The attacks are said to come both from right-wing resistance groups and from FULRO, the separatist movement of mountain minority groups which began in French colonial times.

This home grown resistance seems to represent a nuisance more than a threat to the country's economic development. But the same cannot be said for the continuing war in Kampuchea and the constant threat of renewed fighting with China. American intelligence estimates say about 200,000 Vietnamese troops are in Kampuchea, and about the same number on the China border, where they face what Vietnam says is a force of 12 divisions. Another 40,000 or so troops are in Laos.

The hardware of war is no problem. Hoang Tung told foreign journalists in April, "Arms and ammunition don't cost us a

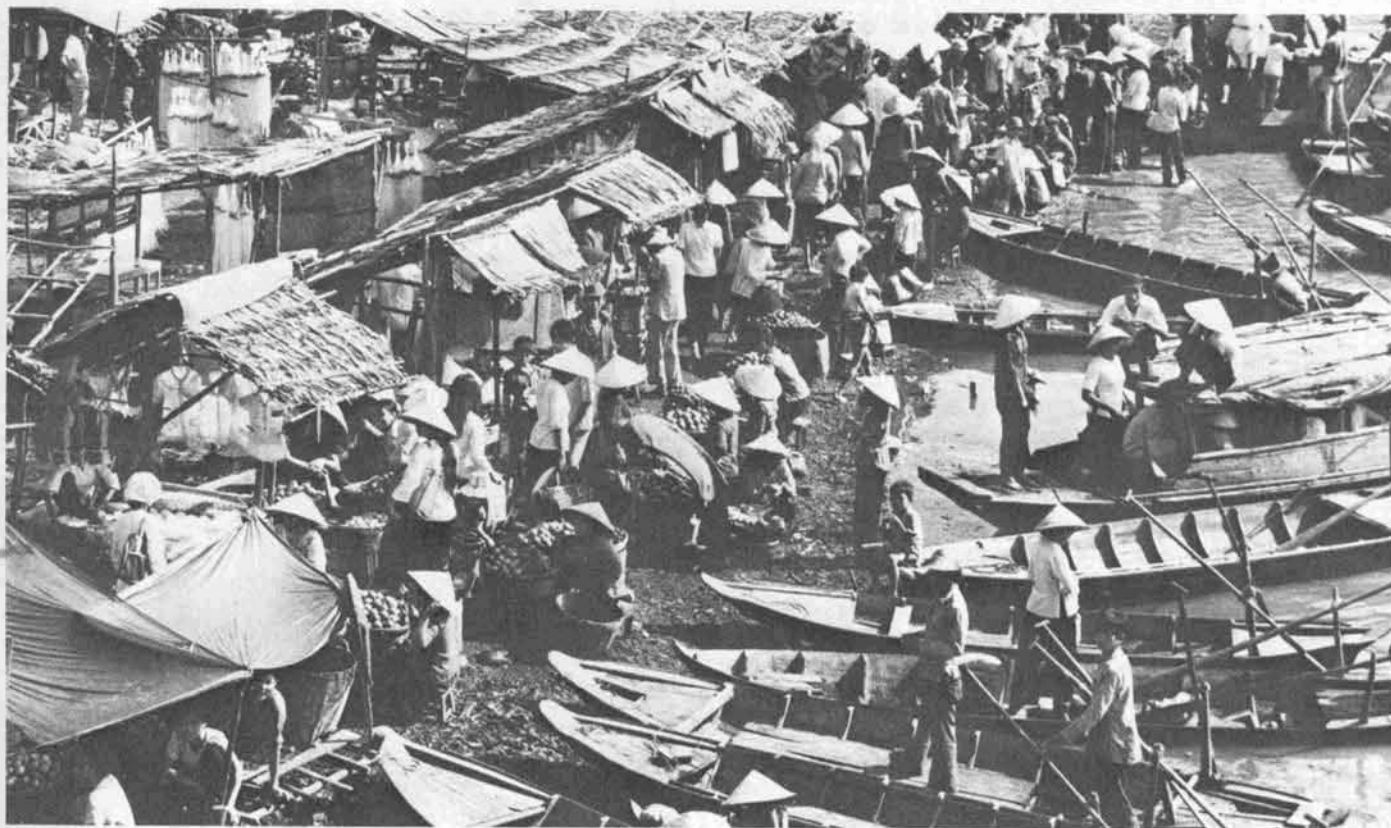
penny. Our Soviet friends supply all that." The hopes people had for a period of peaceful recovery from 30 years of fighting against the French and Americans have been punctured, though. In Hanoi as well as in Ho Chi Minh City, young people respond to the draft with an attitude which falls short of enthusiasm. Conscription also strips farms and factories of some of their youngest, most energetic, best-trained workers.

Vietnamese leaders do not see an early end to the China problem, by which they mean the fighting in Kampuchea as well as the tensions with China itself. "China has not shown that they are willing to talk seriously," a China specialist at the Foreign Ministry says. "China wants to create a constant drain on Vietnam, but we have our ways of dealing with that. We must have armed forces which are also productive forces."

Young people are not enthusiastic about the draft.

Military units in rear areas inside Vietnam—about half the total—are being encouraged to set up their own farms and factories. Navy units have been ordered to take up fishing. Even the troops stationed along the rugged Chinese border are asked to try growing some of their own food or to start forestry projects.

The drive for military production is not related to Resolution Six, but the resolution's economic prescriptions include one which is directly related to threats of further attacks from China. There is a new stress on local initiative in planning and the greatest possible local autonomy in production. In part, this is intended to help make the country more self-sufficient, compensating for the central government's shortage of raw



Mekong delta marketplace.

John Spragens, Jr.



Restaurant in Ca Mau.

materials. At the same time, if provinces and districts are more self-reliant, they will be better able to cope with the hardships of renewed fighting with China, especially if that includes a bombing campaign aimed at the country's industries or its transportation network.

If it were possible to isolate the several problems of Vietnam's economy and deal with them one by one, solutions might be simpler. But the problems are connected, and an adjustment in one area may have unexpected effects in another. Sometimes, fortunately, these effects are positive rather than negative. The new emphasis on small factories in the city is a good example. By helping stimulate agricultural production in the Mekong delta and reducing unemployment in Ho Chi Minh City, the factories reduce the need for new economic zones.

The NEZs were the government's first attempt to boost farm production and reduce urban unemployment, by sending unemployed city dwellers to reopen land deserted during the war and clear new land for agricultural use. City officials at first hoped a million and a half of the four million people packed into Saigon and Cholon at war's end would return to their old homes in the countryside or leave for NEZs. In five years, only half that number have gone.

Poor planning caused many problems. Le Minh Xuan, now a showcase NEZ in the rural part of the Ho Chi Minh City administrative district, was at first a disaster. Settlers were given rice seed and tools and told to farm. The area's acid soil would not support a rice crop, and discouraged settlers returned to the city with horror stories. Now, however, the area is being turned into vast pineapple plantations. When the marshes are properly drained and cleared, they are excellent for pineapple, which has the advantage of being a good export crop.

New guidelines for setting up NEZs, published earlier this year, stress careful research to determine suitable crops before settlers are sent out. And in many cases, like the Pham Van Hai farm just beyond Le Minh Xuan, members of the Vanguard Youth tackle the hardest work—clearing land, setting up rudimentary housing, even planting the first crops.

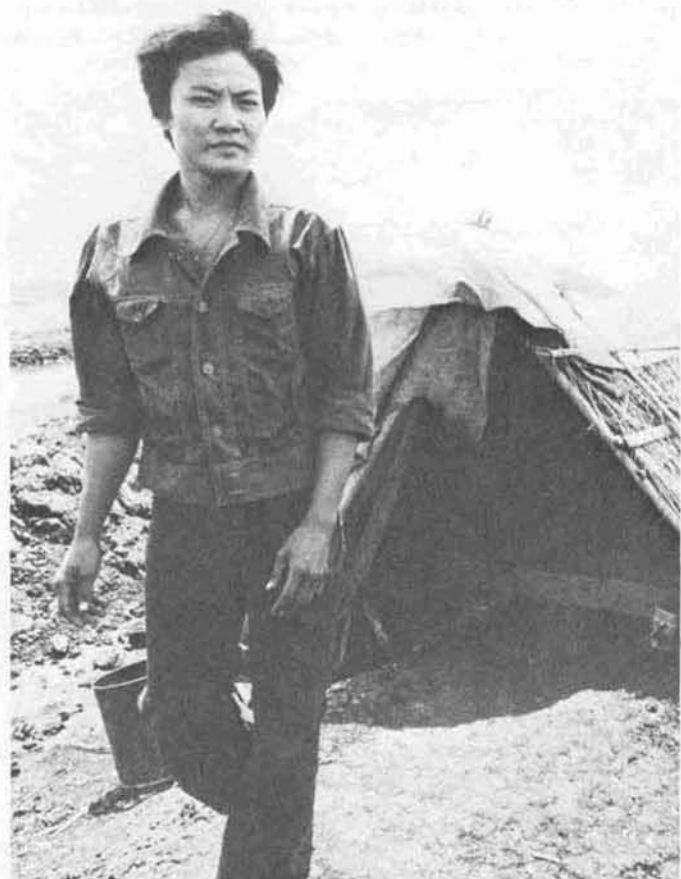
There has not yet been a rush for the new economic zones, but a drive from Pham Van Hai back through Le Minh Xuan toward Saigon offers a clear demonstration that the zones can succeed. The newly opened farms are very primitive. In many

cases people live under thatched lean-tos, each one a long roof set on the ground like barracks without walls. Gradually, people begin to build private houses, first of thatch, then brick. And in Le Minh Xuan itself, the homes are all surrounded with young fruit trees and vegetable gardens.

As factories hire some of the unemployed, they relieve some of the pressure on the city's resources. This, in turn, makes it possible to rely more on the demonstration effect and less on coercion to persuade people to take a chance on the NEZs.

It will take hope, enthusiasm and time to build a firm economic base.

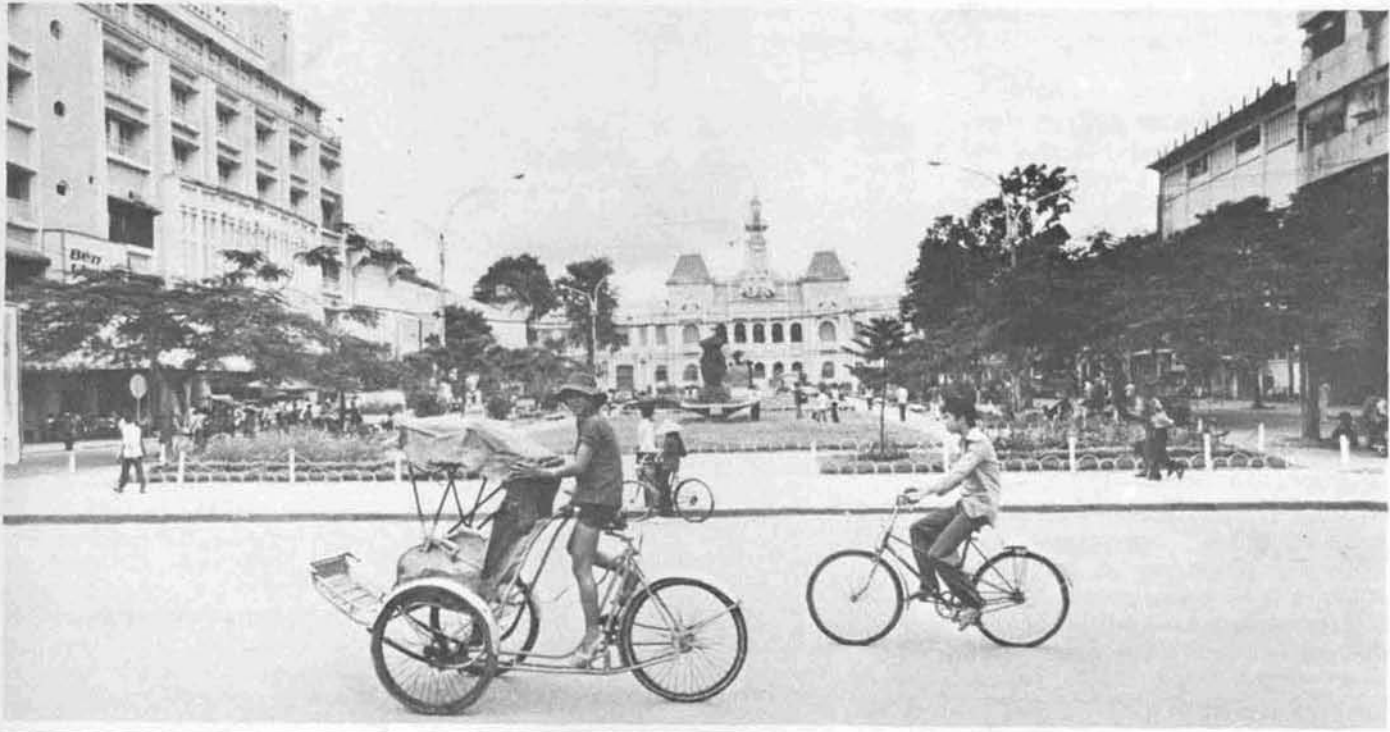
It is a hopeful sign, and Vietnam today needs hopeful signs. The economic problems the nation faces—those which are a legacy of war, those caused by weather, and those caused by poor leadership—are serious and complex. Though by some measures the economy has improved—13 percent unemployment is better than 25 percent; prices doubling in five years don't hit as hard as prices rising 60 percent a year—it will take hope, enthusiasm and time to build a firm economic base. If people at all levels take Resolution Six seriously, that will help. □



Vanguard Youth worker at Pham Van Hai state farm camps out near the pump he supervises.

"MUST WE MAKE ALL THE OLD MISTAKES AGAIN?"

Erich Wulff



John Spragens, Jr.

A veteran revolutionary discusses some of the frustrations of building a new state.

One of the major events of Wulff's visit to Vietnam was a long private conversation with two old friends. Dr. Duong Quynh Hoa had been health minister for the Provisional Revolutionary Government and is now a member of the presidium of the Fatherland Front. Her husband, Nghi, was Wulff's liaison to the National Liberation Front and a high official within the NLF. In 1979 he had

Erich Wulff is a psychiatrist who worked in Hue, Vietnam, from 1963 to 1970. He is now president of the German-Vietnam Friendship Association. Wulff's earlier book *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre*, describing the war as he came to see it, was highly influential in the European peace movement. He returned to Vietnam in January 1979. This article is excerpted from his book on this visit, *Eine Reise nach Vietnam* (Suhrkamp, 1979). The translation is by Martha Winnacker of the Center staff.

no function. During their conversation, Hoa and Nghi expressed many of the frustrations they had experienced during the reunification of Vietnam and the assertion of central power from Hanoi. Other parts of Wulff's book are far more optimistic than this, and some of his experiences in other places contradicted the reports they had received in Saigon. During a visit to Europe later in 1979, Hoa was reported by those who met with her to be more at ease than she was when she met Wulff. Nonetheless, the view from the inside which is reflected in this helps us understand just how difficult the job of rebuilding and transforming a society is. As reported elsewhere in this issue, Resolution Six is an effort to correct some of the mistakes recounted here.

It is nearly 9 o'clock and I stand in front of the door. I definitely want to see Hoa and Nghi. At exactly 9, a small car stops in the middle of the

street, two meters from the sidewalk. I see Nghi in the driver's seat; Hoa has already moved to the rear. In a few seconds I am in the car. Our watchers in the hotel lobby haven't missed this maneuver. Only two of them are still there, because the others have gone with the delegation to the evening program at the Municipal Theater. Neither of these two speaks any foreign language, since the more competent ones have gone with the majority of the group. But they are fast and determined, and in an instant one of them has stationed himself in front of the hood. He holds on tightly while the other palavers with Nghi. I ask Hoa, "Do they want to stop me from going with you?" "For sure," she smiles, "But don't worry, I have a permit [to bring foreign guests home] from the Central Committee." But the policemen don't let themselves be shaken off so quickly, so a compromise is reached: Hoa opens the door extra wide and in-

vites one of the two to come along. "They are very uncultured," she sniffs in French as the car finally drives off.

At Hoa's home, our small shadow follows us in . . . A newspaper is pressed into his hand and he is installed at the end of the dining table, right by the door, while we withdraw to the partly screened sofa. Hoa says he speaks no French and we can talk freely.

But first I look around. The house is a museum. Our seats are made of ebony inlaid with artful mother-of-pearl and ivory. On the shelves along all the walls stand porcelain vases and dishes, one next to the other. Ming, Kiang Hsi, and also Vietnamese proto-porcelain, Thanh Hoa from the 11th and 12th centuries. . . . Hoa explains, "My father put together this collection. It is the last in Vietnam." Her father and grandfather were high mandarins. Does Nghi feel comfortable here? He was always so self-effacing. I hardly dare move for fear of breaking a dish or vase. And how does our shadow, the little cadre feel? But he sits silent, sunk in his newspaper.

We talk. Nghi doesn't say much, mostly it is Hoa who speaks. The re-education camps: some people have simply been forgotten there. All together, there are still about 25,000 inmates. They were supposed to be released, but that has been postponed indefinitely because of the border war with Kampuchea and the tensions with China. Hardly any high officers are still confined, maybe 10

You have to know the limits.

of the highest. Most of the current inmates are young captains and majors for whom no evidence has been found. But that is precisely why they don't want to release them: nobody knows exactly who they are, what they did, and what they might do outside. It would take forever to investigate every case, and Hoa suggests that the security authorities don't know how to begin without documents. Because of a gap in the evidence, which nobody knows how to fill, 25,000 people sit in the camps without a release date—that's security.

Hoa tells me I've come at a critical time. The debates in the party between liberals and hardliners, between pro-Soviet and nationalist wings, are in full swing. The former underground cadres from the cities stand in the crossfire. They had warned against abolishing private trade so quickly, but they couldn't affect the actual process. Le Duc Tho, whom the Politburo has entrusted with



State-run pharmacy, Ho Chi Minh City.

the fate of the South (he's from the South), wants "unity as quickly as possible." He wants the South to look like the North soon, without private shops and factories. So socialist production relations and forms of distribution were cut out of whole cloth by decree without providing the necessary material preconditions and without preparing the people to accept them. The shops were closed—some people were actually thrown out—before a state distribution network was set up. This affected the retailers, the shopkeepers more than anyone else. Wholesalers received some compensation for their inventory (paid in installments, of which the first were the largest). Most of them waited for the first one or two payments and then went abroad. The shopkeepers didn't have big inventories (so they had hardly any claim to compensation). Most of them didn't have the choice (of going abroad) but could only try to make it in the "new economic zones," often without tools or agricultural knowledge. Many of them came back to the cities, because they couldn't hold out. They live from begging, street trade or by depending on relatives who still have money or work. "In principle"—that means on paper—the traders could turn their shops into crafts factories processing state-issued materials, as long as they were not known in the neighborhoods as exploiters. But precisely this clause led to denunciations: what trader doesn't have an enemy who has been waiting for a chance to get revenge? And when party directives anticipate exploiters, then exploiters will be found. In the provinces,

the campaign against exploiters among the traders had even worse results than in Ho Chi Minh City. There was no longer anything to buy, not only because the goods were in short supply but because the distribution net had been partially destroyed. The people have become apathetic, resigned.

Nghi adds: "You have to know the limits, how much people are willing to do and to endure. If you don't, you run aground."

Hoa continues: "Many well-to-do people and intellectuals stayed in April 1975 because they said to themselves, when Hoa and her friends come we have no reason to go." When the PRG introduced itself before a sea of people on May 15, 1975, the people were still delighted. Hardly any of that remains today. When he arrived at the Saigon airport, Le Duan, General Secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party, told the cadres they were not conquerors but liberators. But the cadres have not always held to this principle. Their training was too inadequate, and the temptations were too great. "it's easy to make no demands and to be incorruptible when nobody has anything . . ." But the Northern cadres saw that here almost every worker had a refrigerator, and they asked: "Are these supposed to be the exploited? No these are the exploiters!" So a lot of the cadres became suspicious and hostile—or corrupt. Nobody had explained to them that exploitation could also mean making a country dependent or that many people in Saigon had been betrayed even though they

could live better from the garbage of the American military machine than the cadres could from their salaries. Furthermore, the shops and the black market were so full of goods.

Nghi added: "But the worst was the suspicion. Maybe a blood bath would have been better and more humane. Then we could start over, the way they did in Europe after attacking the Nazis. But today almost everyone suspects everyone. First there was the campaign against the reactionary forces. That was against real reactionaries, and there were plenty of them. But that campaign—just like the current one against exploiters in commerce—got out of control. Then suspicion extended to the intellectuals. In 1975 almost all of them were ready to cooperate and brought their whole enthusiasm to the effort. Now most of them are resigned."

Hoa adds, "If you treat an intellectual with trust, he/she can make any effort. But if you mistrust them, they are useless."

Now many revolutionary cadres from the South are treated as potential "reactionaries," says Hoa. They understand the relationships here, and they tried to minimize and correct the mistakes their

new Hanoi superiors made out of lack of knowledge or false evaluation of the situation. But that has led to severe tensions . . . Some southern cadres were imprisoned after the fourth party congress. They were accused of factionalism and of being molded by imperialist culture. . . .

Nghi asks: "Must we make all the mistakes again?" Both agree that the worst evil is the lack of political culture among

Some southern cadres were accused of factionalism and of being molded by imperialist culture.

the cadres. This goes all the way to the top leadership of the party. Most of them are stupid, says Nghi. Even the political education of the highest functionaries is "extremely relative." So the most essential points were often not considered. All the measures against reactionaries, against factionalists, against exploiters depend on the arbitrary decision of the responsible officials. There is no legal basis for them, there is no *habeas corpus*, no codification of offenses, no guaranteed processes.

"How often I have spoken in the national assembly to say we must have laws which define punishable offenses, including political crimes. But nothing happened," says Hoa.

It is already after 11:00. Curfew begins at midnight. Hoa wants to show me the upstairs, but first I want to know what to do with the information they have given me. Shall I keep it to myself? Shall I report it? Hoa asks for five minutes to think about it. Then she comes back with a classical Vietnamese plate as a gift for Edith, "Speak," she says, "maybe it will help us avoid the worst mistakes." Then we look at the other rooms, which are also practically museum places. I couldn't live here. Our shadow became quite restless, but he didn't dare follow us. What would he report about these five minutes while we were out of his sight? Nghi brings me back to the hotel alone. Our watcher has become a real shadow. He sits behind us in the car, but for us he is no longer there. We drive slowly through the night. "Don't lose your courage. Or your trust," I say to Nghi as we say good-bye in front of the hotel door.

"Don't worry," he answers, "maybe I am too impatient." □



Revolutionary soldiers arrive in Saigon, April 30, 1975.

Paul Quinn-Judge

DEVELOPMENT POLICY: PROVIDING

Vietnam needs everything. The problem for planners is to figure out what to do first to promote balanced growth.

When the North was liberated—in 1954—it had only three established industries worth talking about: the Hon Gai coal mine; electricity, and the largest generating plant was the 15,000 kilowatt Hanoi plant; and light industry, of which the most important at the time was the Nam Dinh textile mill. That was all. And when the North was liberated, the colonialists took away the best of everything. So we cannot think of industrialization as being merely the construction of a lot of factories. The problem is to strengthen the whole structure of production.

In our socialist regime we cannot, under any circumstances, allow people to go unemployed and put them out on the streets. We cannot allow people to starve. They must have work to do. They need work to survive. And only if they have work can we solve our political and social problems. When people make revolution, the goal is to give people work so they can live.

This is a problem all countries have to deal with, but in Vietnam it is one of the principal problems. The state can feed people for a while—give them emergency assistance for a while—but this is a state with empty hands. We have to create employment.

We need, for example, to help people develop handicraft occupations in the countryside so they can have more work to do, increase the production of goods, increase their income. In Hai Hung as in many provinces there are districts where the income from handicraft production is equal to the income from agricultural production. Our course is one which includes increasing the number of crops, raising animals—and we can only raise animals if we increase the number of crops, because this gives us the fodder for them—and at the same time adding handicraft occupations.

Professor Le Hong Tam is an economist at the Institute of Economics in Hanoi, a section of the Vietnamese Commission for Social Sciences. This article consists of excerpts from a three-hour interview he gave the Center's John Spragens, Jr. this August. Spragens did the translation. This article expands on some of the points Professor Tam made in a paper titled "Industrialization in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam," delivered at a March conference on alternative development strategies for Asia sponsored by the United Nations Institute for Training and Research.



Hanoi school children.

THE BASICS

Le Hong Tam



John Spragens, Jr.

This is not something that any individual farmer can do alone. It requires organization. Before the revolution, farmers knew that it was possible to do these things. They knew it was possible to raise another crop of rice. They knew it was possible to raise animals. They knew it was possible to have handicraft trades. They knew all of this. It was not that they didn't know. But they could not do it, because each individual was an isolated production unit.

How does Vietnam bring new technology into the economy? A new technology within a particular economy is one that is appropriate to that economy, not just something which is new on a world scale. So we use the concept of technology broadly. In the past, for example, people used varieties of rice which could be harvested only after 120 days. Now they use 100-day strains. This is new technology. In the past, people did not know about using fertilizer. Now they know about using fertilizer. This is new technology.

There are several factors without which the new technology cannot be brought in. The first is: will the farmers accept it? Because it is they who must use it. First of all, they must recognize that it is worthwhile. In order to show that it is worthwhile, Vietnamese technicians carry out experiments right in the agricultural areas. For example, to introduce a new variety of rice, I plant it here, then I bring the farmers in to see it.

Then they need to know how to do it. The state technical cadre must go down to the cooperative and, along with the farmers, plant the new rice. Once they know how to do it, they must be able to do it. In many regions Vietnam's farmers used to be very poor. They had the knowledge, but they didn't have the money to buy the new rice seeds, to buy fertilizer, so the state had to lend it to them. This is one example of introducing technology which may not be new on the world scene, but which is new to Vietnamese farmers.

If the state has to do everything for the farmers when the country is so poor, it just cannot be done. So we have this problem: We want the farmers to grasp the new technology so that they can solve their own problems. This means we have to open lots of schools in the rural areas so they can learn to read and write. The North did this long ago; in the South it is beginning. In the curriculum at school they include technical subjects. For example, if they are studying biology, the lessons will talk about the life cycle of the rice plant, about the life cycle and methods of raising hogs.

I'm not talking here about the specialized technical education at the universities, but only about development in the countryside. This is the important idea, because the state cannot possibly train tens of thousands of people with university-level educations to send out to the countryside.

Something that few of the people we have met understand about our situation is this: They think we want a kind of socialism which will pay the way for everyone. No, this is not the case. Naturally the leaders must be concerned about everyone in the society. But we are talking about the economy. The economy must be effective. It must bring all-around results, results for millions of people, not just results for a certain number of people. Only when you think of it in this way can you understand that however much capital the state may have, it cannot pour it all into developing industry. It must, at the same time, set aside a certain essential amount of capital to develop culture and education. Only then will the capital invested in new technology bring results.

There is also this aspect of industrialization: It has been our

stand from the very beginning to coordinate the development of industry and agriculture. We're not talking simply about the coordination of a few big, heavy industries. If you go down to the local level, to a district, to a cooperative, right there the people will have industrial units. If we look at the case of America, for example, this is like that earlier age when there would be a smithy and a blacksmith who would make tools, who would repair tools, repair small machines, make carts.

In the North every district has a machine shop. This machine shop will make small machines for agriculture, hand tools, and carts; it will make all the basic necessities for agriculture in that district. It will repair all those tools. And for the tractors in use in the district, many of the machine shops can make some of the simpler spare parts.

This development of local industries in every area—in districts and provinces—is an urbanization process, bringing an urban character to the countryside while avoiding the negative phenomena, the negative results of over-urbanization.

With fifty-some million people coming out of a decades-long war, the problems of daily life are very big. So the goal for the five year plan we are just finishing was to try to solve to a certain extent the problems of people's material and cultural life. In 1980, looking back, we see that we do not yet have a guaranteed supply of staple foods. No one is starving, but the diet is still below the calorie level people need. So the country must import food every year. We need to increase agricultural production enough to guarantee a reserve, so that when we lose a crop to a typhoon we will not have to buy food abroad.

Also, because we have not solved the food problem at more than the most basic level, livestock breeding is very limited. Vietnam now has only 10 million hogs.

In order to solve the staples problem, we have to take a look at industry to see what industry can do to help agriculture develop, to solve the food problem. One thing is that the electric power industry is not developed enough to supply electricity to agriculture—to pump water.

We joke about this sometimes. Some time ago I met a group of people with a very positive attitude toward Vietnam. They said, "Aren't you just dogmatically following Lenin?" Because



George Cohen

Housing construction in Hanoi.

Lenin said it was necessary to electrify Russia, and they came here and saw that we were electrifying the country, and they said, "Your country is poor. You need to do things that bring results. Why this electrification?" But if we don't electrify, the people of Vietnam will starve.

Besides the shortage of electricity, there's not enough coal. The main fuel for generating plants in the North has been coal, though now we have added some hydroelectric plants. And coal is not only for generating electricity. For example, in the countryside in the North they need lots of coal to make bricks.

This is liberation. It offers a future. But right now it makes great demands.

We also face problems in the production of consumer goods. Every year each person receives coupons for five yards of cloth. Five yards, if it isn't torn, is acceptable. This doesn't mean it's enough; it isn't. What about raw materials for weaving? Since liberation we have found that the Thuan Hai region in the South, near Cam Ranh, has soil and climate suitable for growing cotton. We are now opening cotton farms in the area, but it will take several years before there is a good crop. And it will not be enough.

This means we have to develop a synthetic textile industry. We've already planted forests so we can take the wood to make viscose. Besides that, we can make other kinds of synthetic fibers from coal, from oil, from gas.

Everywhere you look there are imbalances—we don't have enough electricity compared to our needs, we don't have enough coal, we don't have enough cement, we don't have enough iron and steel, either, or fertilizer or fibers for textiles. To deal with these imbalances we have focused on the problems of food, clothing, shelter and education.

This is liberation. It offers a future. But right now it makes great demands which we must take care of. People say, "Before we were at war and I couldn't go to school. Now we're liberated and I need to study." The state can't tell them not to study. I don't know what it's like in your country, but this is the way it is in Vietnam.

We have to be honest. With fifty-odd million people, we have to help ourselves. People from other countries ask me, "When your country is so poor, how can you be self-reliant?" I



Agricultural motor factory in Hanoi.

ask them in return, "My country, with 53 million people—by 1985 it will be nearly 60 million people—is there any country which could take care of so many people?" It's not possible. We must use our own strength, our own talents to develop our economy.

The coming five year plan will follow a course of development designed to provide the basic necessities in food, clothing, housing, education and medical care for the Vietnamese people. At the same time we must have production for export, because only with exports can you get the technology, the capital that you don't yet have—in order to solve the problem of food, clothing, economic development. We call these the two strategic objectives.

How far we'll get by 1985, we'll just have to wait and see. We can't say for certain. But we are certain that we will reduce the strain. That much is clear. There are some things we're sure of, that we can say right now. In the next five years many factories which are under construction will be completed.

There is the Da River hydroelectric plant—1.9 million kilowatts—which we have already started to build. By the end of the five year plan, in 1985, it will be operating at least half its capacity. There is the Pha Lai thermal power plant with an output of 620 megawatts which is also under development and will go into operation in another three or four years. Or the cement plants. There are two plants—one built in cooperation with the Soviet Union and one built in cooperation with Denmark. They are under construction, and both will go into operation in the 1981-85 period.

Besides that, there are existing chemical fertilizer plants which are being expanded, to increase the production. And

there is the apatite mine the Chinese damaged during their attack. We are restoring it and expanding it.

So investment in the next five years will be both to meet domestic needs, reducing the need for imports, and at the same time to provide some exports.

We have had many indications that since Vietnam joined

We still need economic and technical cooperation with all other countries, even the United States.

COMECON, companies from many capitalist countries want to restore relations. We welcome this, because it's to our advantage. And if we can develop our economy on the basis of good international relations, then it will help stabilize the world political situation. This is our line; it's not just a political trick. The corporations know this.

So I hope you will report that Vietnam has not changed its line, even though we are participating in COMECON. Vietnam has a great potential in labor and natural resources, and wants very much to develop them. And this requires more than just the economic and technical cooperation of the socialist countries. That is not enough. We still need economic and technical cooperation with all other countries, even the United States. If Carter were to reconsider tomorrow and end the embargo, Vietnam would be the first to cheer. That's a fact. □



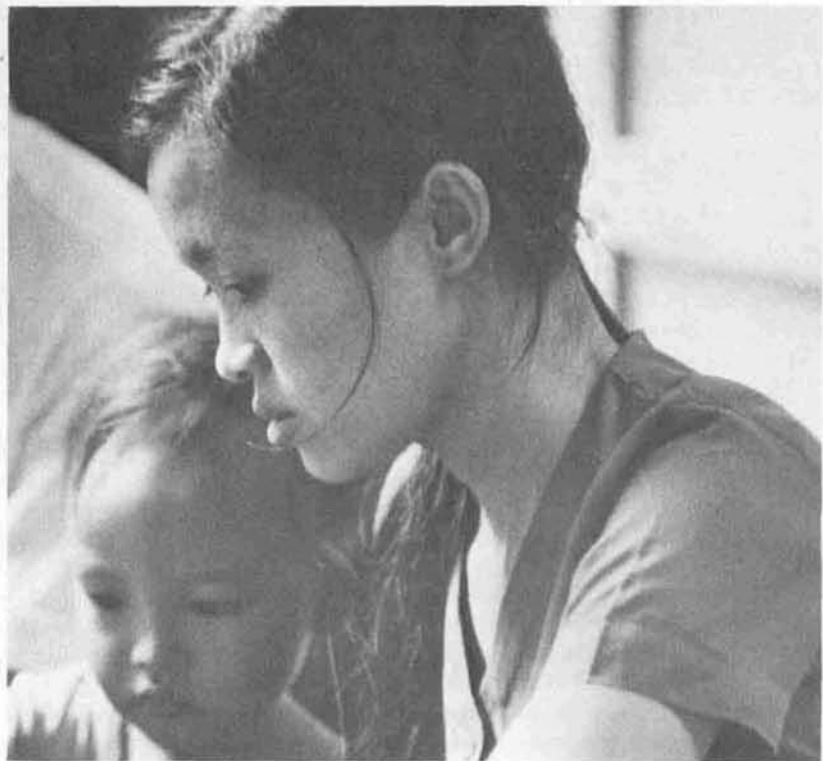
Agricultural motor factory in Hanoi.

George Cohen

THOSE WHO HAVE STAYED

Sara Rosner

Long visits with family and friends reveal subtle but profound changes in attitude since 1975.



Sara Rosner

It was evening when we drove into Phan Thiet. The smell of fish sauce which greeted our nostrils told us that we were, indeed, in my husband's hometown, 100 miles up the coast from Saigon—the fish sauce capital of Vietnam.

As our van wove its way down narrow streets my husband pointed out the houses of friends and relatives. Finally it stopped outside a one-story, yellow cement house and we were surrounded by hugging, laughing relatives: brothers, sisters and parents my husband had left fifteen years before to study in Canada.

Seven of my husband's eight brothers and sisters are still in Vietnam, as are his parents, his grandfather and many aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews and nieces. His oldest sister works in a handicrafts cooperative making straw baskets, mats and hats. Two sisters and one brother are teachers; one brother is the leader of a Vanguard Youth brigade (teams of young people who volunteer for several years in the most difficult reconstruction tasks) and the two youngest are students—one in a university and one in a high school.

We spent three months in Vietnam, from the middle of June to the middle of September, and traveled over 6,000 miles by boat, car, bus and plane. When in Saigon, we stayed in the home of one of my husband's aunts whose husband is still in a re-education camp. For transportation we borrowed a Honda motorcycle.

I was the first American to stay in the country that long and the first to live in a Vietnamese family since the end of the war in 1975. I was able to see from the inside what life is like for the majority of Vietnamese we hear so little about: those who stay. I saw what it is like to live in a poor country grappling with the

crippling effects of a long and devastating war. And I saw the courage of many ordinary people struggling against often overwhelming odds.

I saw a country and a people fighting to survive. And I understood why many choose to leave.

There is nothing easy about life in Vietnam today. The war did too much damage to the land and people—physically and emotionally—for that. It will take many years to "heal the wounds" and, in the meantime, life will continue to be too hard for many.

Our first visitor in Phan Thiet was a great uncle from down the street. He had joined the resistance against the French and regrouped to the North in 1954 (after the Geneva peace accords), returning to Phan Thiet only after "liberation" (April 30, 1975). Now 45, he remembered my husband as a boy of eight.

During our stay in Phan Thiet, we met many relatives who had gone north in 1954 and only recently been able to return home.

On a personal level, within families, reunification is a reality and a very precious one. I was moved by the mutual respect shown by both "sides," the sincere desire to understand each other, and the care taken not to impose one's set of values on another. Although those who joined the revolution are often in positions of authority now, they do not impose their views, but rather try to inspire and to win over friends and relatives to the movement of building a new Vietnam.

It is popular among many southerners who led a comfortable life during the war to complain about the deteriorating standard of living since 1975 and to claim that the revolutionary cadres are now living well while everyone else goes without.

And yet, I found that the same people who loved to talk about the "privileges" of the cadres spoke with awe of the frugal life style of their own cadre relatives.

Sara Rosner is a Bostonian who now lives and teaches in Montreal. She spent three months in Vietnam with her Vietnamese husband in 1979.

An interesting problem has arisen from reunification. Those who lived under the former regime consider patronage the normal way of life. As regrouped southerners returned from the north, they often assumed positions of authority in their hometowns. Soon relatives came to them for favors: to get a son out of re-education camp, or to protect their factory from any "socialist transformations."

When the new official refused, he would incur the wrath of all his relatives.

I often heard people say, "In the old days, one official could save a hundred relatives. Now they can't save even one."

The same people who complain about corruption among revolutionary cadres curse their own relatives for not "doing favors" for them.

We met one such cadre who had finally been forced by his constituents (almost all relatives) to resign because he would not use patronage to help them.

There have been subtle, but profound, changes within every family since 1975: changes in the relationship between husband and wife, between parents and children, and between rich and poor relatives.

One family we spent a lot of time with typified this change:

In her early 40s, the mother of five children, Mai is still waiting for her husband Nam to be released from re-education camp. A former high-level intelligence operative for the CIA in the Thieu government, responsible for the Saigon press "psy-war," he has been in a camp since the spring of 1975.

Mai's youngest child was born only months before the fall of the Thieu government, and does not know her father. The two older children have visited him with their mother, and his

many sisters visit him regularly, although the visits are often too short.

He complains about poor food, hard work, lack of medicine and poor living conditions. Mai complains that he has been kept in the camp too long.

Talking with Mai about life during the war, we found that although they had lived well materially, and could give their children everything they wanted, their marriage and family life had been destroyed by life in Saigon.

Their marriage and family life had been destroyed in old Saigon.

During the war, the decadence of life in Saigon and other southern cities—the corruption, the greed, the bars and prostitutes, the mercenary attitude toward life and the general purposelessness—destroyed many families. Traditional Vietnamese values were often shattered under the impact of the American presence.

Once a kind and considerate husband, Nam spent more and more time making the rounds of the bars with his friends, drinking and picking up prostitutes. He took a second wife (formerly a very common practice, now illegal) and increasingly neglected his wife and children.

"By the time of liberation, I had lost all feeling for him except as the father of my children," Mai admitted.

But life in the camp has mellowed him, made him think for the first time about the kind of life he was living and what he had done to his family. He is humbler now, and writes very moving, loving letters to his wife, thanking her for her loyalty,



Sara Rosner

for visiting him, and praising her for raising the children so well alone. He was especially moved when she brought the older children to visit him.

"At least the camp has taught him to love his family," his sisters often remarked to Mai.

The children clearly did not feel deprived or regret the changes.

They all felt sorry for the younger children, born just before the end of the war, who are growing up "deprived."

"The older ones had everything," they said. "They traveled, spent the summers at the beach, ate in restaurants, had lots of clothes and toys and good food, plenty of pocket money, and a car at their disposal.

"But the younger children have nothing."

The children would listen, but clearly did not feel deprived or regret the changes.

Although her father was still in the re-education camp, the eldest daughter was chosen leader of her neighborhood chil-

dren's group. She was in charge of distributing the children's magazines (for which she kept careful records), of teaching songs and dances, of leading the neighborhood clean-ups (when children set off with bags to pick up all the papers they can find), of organizing group activities (such as an all-day outing to the country), of teaching the other children to crochet handbags and hats, and all the tasks of a group leader.

The two older sisters were up each morning at five to join the other neighborhood children in morning exercises, and usually spent the rest of the day with their group.

Every evening there was a children's program on television which often taught songs and dances. The five children would sing along, songbook in hand. Even the four-year-old knew many songs and dances, and often all the children would perform together. The eldest learned the songs by heart in order to teach the other children in the neighborhood.

Late in August, she was chosen from her neighborhood to go to the city summer camp—a three day overnight camp set up in the center of Saigon. (It was open all summer, and different groups of children took turns going.)

Although she never contradicted the adults when they reminisced about the "good old days" it was clear that she did not share their regrets. □



Sara Rosner



Ha Long Bay.

Sara Rosner

Intellectuals, North and South

Huong, a teacher, lives in the suburbs of Hanoi. She gets up at 4:30 every morning to haul water up to her fourth floor apartment, cook breakfast and prepare a lunch to take to work. Then she rides her bicycle for an hour to get to work.

She works until late afternoon and on the way home every day must go to the market. She cooks supper, and stays up until 11 every night correcting homework, preparing her courses and doing her own research.

"By the time I get to school in the morning, I am exhausted," she tells me. "No matter how much talent I may have, how great my potential as a teacher, I just don't have the energy by the time I get into class to be a good teacher."

And yet, she has chosen and continues to choose to live and work in Vietnam.

Another friend, Thanh, who studied abroad for eight years before returning to

Vietnam in the early 70s, is now assistant director of a factory in Saigon. A gentle, modest and thoughtful person, he speaks of the difficulties of life in Vietnam today: the hunger, the lack of necessities, and the trouble he often has understanding the "new life."

"The communists are true patriots. I am sure of that, so I want to understand the new policies and new ways so that I can work for my people. My country and people are very poor; that is why I love them and want to stay here, to work for my people."

"I must love my people: love them even with all their weaknesses and their faults. I must love them with all the bad as well as the good, like a marriage. Sometimes it is very hard. It is easy to get frustrated and angry when you see things happening that you don't like, and decide to leave."

"But I have lived in the west before. I know what it is like to live there, far away from your own country, your own

people. I also know the material comforts there. Life is much easier. But because I have already had the experience of living abroad, I am not so eager to leave Vietnam. I want to stay here."

There have been a lot of adjustments to make since the end of the war, and many people find them too difficult.

"Every family is divided. Each person sees things differently so there are many struggles in every family, even between husband and wife."

"There is little joy in Vietnam today."

"But I am more at ease in my mind than before. Before I did not know what I was working for. Now I know. I am working for my people and my country. So I work with my mind at ease and I work very hard."

"Before I didn't work hard. No one did."

"This is the hardest time, both materially and emotionally. But I am very optimistic. I believe it will get better."

—Sara Rosner

LE MINH XUAN: TWO FAMILIES

By Christine White



John Spragens, Jr.

Different past lives shape the way neighbors at a model new economic zone view their present and their future.

No one had been notified we would be coming to these houses; we'd just have to hope that someone was at home. It was getting towards 11, the time that people came home from the fields. I picked a house.

An attractive, sad-looking woman who appeared to be in her late 30s invited us to sit down. I had just taken a

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chair when her husband, returning from work, poked his head in the door and, seeing me, grinned and said "Hi!" in English, as if his last chat with an American friend had been only yesterday. He had an open, boyish face. He went to wash the mud off his legs and joined us.

The man who had welcomed me to his house in such a familiar way was Nguyen Van Net, his wife was Chau Thi To Nga, and they had six children. He was 41 years old; his wife was 40. They had moved here in May 1978, a little more than a year before.

He was a native of Long An province, but had lived in Saigon most of his life. His family had sent him to Saigon to go to school in 1944 (when he was six). In 1960 he entered the Thu Duc Officers Training School and graduated in 1961 with the rank of candidate officer in the Saigon army. By 1969 he was a captain, and by 1973 he had become a staff officer at general staff headquarters.

Why had he not left Vietnam as a refugee? There were two reasons, he said. First, because of his mother, wife and children whom he did not want to leave behind; second, because he had not committed any crimes against the population.

He had been at a re-education center from June 15, 1975, to May 5, 1978. He had owned a private house in Saigon where his family remained until 1978, but after he returned from re-education and was accepted by the state farm as an agricultural worker, he sold it and the whole family moved to Le Minh Xuan.

At Le Minh Xuan, Net was allocated 1,000 square meters for his house, fishpond and garden. Most of the garden produce is eaten by the family. His average salary is only \$15 a month, and some

days he doesn't reach the production norm. There were still a lot of problems, he said. Since payment depends on production, the pay is all right if the harvest is good, but otherwise it is not enough. He is not well, and there is not much medicine available.

Nga, his wife, worked as a nurse in a Cholon hospital before she married. She had stopped working there when she married and had been a housewife ever since. Their eldest, a son, was 20-year-old Nguyen Minh Dang. He had studied to the 11th grade, and in October 1978 entered the army for "obligatory military service." Two sons and two daughters, ranging in age from 18 to 12, lived with them, as did an 11-year-old relative whose widowed mother lived in Saigon.

Net struck me as someone who was honestly trying to make the best of things, while voicing complaints as openly as he could in the situation. His wife, however, seemed quite unreconciled to her great comedown in social and economic status. As a Saigon officer's wife she had doubtless had a nice house and at least one servant; she was now living in a simple woven rattan peasant house. The room where we sat had one remnant of her past glory—a glass case enclosing a large Japanese doll elaborately dressed in a brightly colored traditional gown. The only other decorations in the house were two Buddhist paintings.

The house next door was very different indeed. As I entered the door, I saw a photo of Ho Chi Minh on one wall, a photo of Ho Chi Minh with Ton Duc Thang (who succeeded him as Vietnam's president) on another. On a third was a diploma of merit—"War Medal, Grade 3"—awarded by the government of the



Ho Van Thiet, director of the Le Minh Xuan state farm, gave me some figures on the farm's operation. It covers 400 hectares, of which 700 have been planted, all in pineapple. The majority of the labor force is made up of 2,600 Vanguard Youth (unmarried young volunteers from Ho Chi Minh City). Thirty percent of them are young women. There are also 1,200 families (with 8,000 family members) from Saigon settled on the farm, most of them with at least one family member working for the farm, and all with children.

The work force is divided into 20 work teams—16 production teams of about 150 workers each and four specialized

The pay is all right if the harvest is good, but otherwise it is not enough.

Democratic Republic of Vietnam to one Nguyen Van Ngoc, a soldier from the South who went north in 1954.

In fact, there were wall-to-wall decorations, and the choice was most eclectic. There were both a pretty Japanese calendar and a Vietnamese calendar with a photo of a party meeting with flags. The wall under the photo of Ho Chi Minh was papered with the pages of a glossy agricultural magazine, *Focus*, put out by the Imperial Chemical Corporation. As the family could not read the English captions advertising "Gramoxone, a revolutionary herbicide for use in tropical crops," the magazine had clearly been put up for its lavish photos of high yield rice and lush banana trees.

Nguyen Thi Het was full of energy and enthusiasm, and hardly stopped laughing, smiling and talking during our visit. One could hardly imagine a more total contrast to the tragic looking woman next door.

Their very names indicated the differences between them. The wife of the former Saigon officer had a typical double-barreled name—To Nga, "White Swan." Het means simply "the end." "You must be your parents' youngest," I said with a laugh when she told us her name. Southern peasant families often just name their children by numbers—"Two" for the oldest (there is a superstition about the vulnerability of a first child to jealous evil spirits), "Three" for the next, and so on until the last one, named Ut. Het was a humorous variation on Ut.

Het was 33 years old and stayed home

to take care of her five children. Her husband, Nguyen Van Phuoc, 30, was off at work and we did not meet him. There was a photo of him on the wall—a typical Saigon studio photo of a very handsome young man in a soulful movie star pose.

Before 1975, Het worked for many years as a petty trader in order to feed herself and her husband, who could not work for fear of being forced into the Saigon army. But after they had a number of children, they faced increasing economic difficulties. Phuoc cut off a finger so he could get a job without worrying about being conscripted. He found work driving an earth-moving truck.

The family moved to Le Minh Xuan in 1976, and Phuoc began work as a driver for the state farm. They also received 1,000 square meters for house, garden and fish pond. They now have fish, two pigs, and four chickens, not to mention a blind and squeaking litter of puppies. They had collected quite a few consumer goods as well: two bicycles, a television and a Singer sewing machine. (The family next door probably had such things once, but had to sell them to live while the man was in re-education camp.)

It was Phuoc's elder brother who had earned the revolutionary diploma which was displayed on the wall. He had joined the anti-French colonial war over 30 years ago, then regrouped to the North with the other revolutionary troops from the South in 1954. He was now back in his native South, working as a member of the provincial government in nearby Long An province. Het's three older brothers and one older sister were all peasants.

teams of about 200 workers each. The specialized teams are in charge of construction, machinery, insecticides and plant protection, and making fertilizer.

People began arriving at Le Minh Xuan in October 1975. By the beginning of 1978 the farm had harvested 150 tons of pineapple. The farm has now harvested over 100 hectares with an average yield of 10 tons of pineapple per hectare per year.

Considering that four years ago this was swampy land in a free-fire zone, an incredible amount has been done. First the soil had been cleared of mines and unexploded munitions by an army unit. Then canals were dug. Somehow, houses were built, children went to school, pineapples were planted and harvested, and a new hospital building went up.

It is difficult to draw up a balance sheet. The pessimist says a glass is half empty; the optimist describes it as half full. Clearly the ex-officer's wife feels her glass has been emptied, whereas Het's cup is overflowing, and she is full of energy and optimism. For both of their sakes, I hope that the bold project of Le Minh Xuan succeeds soon.

It will be something of a miracle if a farm and rural town can flourish on what had been poor soil, and urban unemployed and Saigon army soldiers and officers become good farmers. With the terrible social and economic problems of post-war Vietnam, such risk taking was essential; doing nothing, suicidal. Considering what has been achieved, optimism seems justified. □

REFUGEES: STILL AN ISSUE



Refugees arrive in the Philippines, August 1979.

Refugee departures from Vietnam slowed to a trickle after July 1979, but there are still questions about why some people left while others stayed.

When tens of thousands of Vietnamese "boat people," many of them ethnic Chinese, hit the shores of Southeast Asia in 1978 and 1979, Vietnam drew a storm of criticism from the international community. Reports that it was deliberately expelling *Hoa*, or overseas Chinese, circulated widely and credibly along with tragic stories of death at sea. In July 1979 the United Nations sponsored a conference in Geneva. Among other things, it attempted to find a way for those who want to leave Vietnam to do so legally. Since then the number of "boat people" has dropped sharply, and the proportion of *Hoa* among them is also much smaller than it was. But questions about Vietnamese actions and attitudes at that time—with their overtones of racism—remain.

We presented the basic background a year ago, in issue 68 of the *Chronicle*. Since then we have received other materials which shed light on the situation. In 1979 Harvard University scholar Charles Benoit, formerly a Ford Foundation representative in Saigon, conducted a number of lengthy interviews in Hong Kong with *Hoa* who left Vietnam. Benoit is fluent in both Vietnamese and Chinese. His interviews reflect the dismay of *Hoa* who found themselves the target of suspicion and even hostility just because of their ethnic background, and despite lifetimes of loyal and skilled service. His subjects also hinted at causes for resentment against them as a privileged minority. A much longer paper, from which these interviews were excerpted, will appear soon in *The Third Indochina Conflict*, edited by David Elliott, to be published by Westview Press.

Rewi Alley, a New Zealander who has lived in China since the 1920s, interviewed some of the 260,000 *Hoa* who have fled to China since 1978—most of them coming from the North, but some from the southern provinces. Like Benoit's subjects, Alley's also represented skilled and educated workers and administrators whose loss has been a severe blow to Vietnamese reconstruction and development efforts. We have summarized some of the more interesting points from the Alley interviews, which appeared in the February, March and May 1980 issues of *Eastern Horizon*, a Hong Kong monthly.

During his visit to Vietnam in August 1980, the Center's John Spragens, Jr. spoke to a number of officials about the refugee problem. He reports on their perspective as well as on two *Hoa* families at opposite ends of the class ladder who have remained in Vietnam.

Hong Kong

"Vietnam's relations with China have always been very complex," reminisced a former major in Hanoi's army. "Though China helped Vietnam a great deal during its wars against the French and the Americans, still the Vietnamese live in great fear of China's real intentions. When the two countries are on good terms, everything is fine; but once they turn sour, the Vietnamese become alarmed and react instinctively."



Children at a refugee camp in Hong Kong, July 1979.

Major Bong (a pseudonym) had been a party member for 30 years and had a long record of participation in Vietnam's revolutionary struggles. Nevertheless, in late 1978 he found himself stripped of his responsibilities and, after China's invasion of Vietnam, expelled.

"In 1952 I was with Ho Chi Minh in Viet Bac, in 1954 with Vo Nguyen Giap at Dien Bien Phu. But all the same, at a time when Vietnam was being threatened by China, the Vietnamese no longer dared have *Hoa* people in their military. After China's invasion they feared a second attack, this time with Hanoi as its objective, and so on February 18 (one day after China's invasion) began expelling us overseas."

Major Bong has a proud air one associates with high-ranking communist cadre. "In the course of the war I escaped death many times," he said, then added with a trace of bitterness, "Those who have seen what I have seen and know what I know, but find themselves in the free world, are few."

"In 1948, when I was only 14, I carried secret messages between Viet Minh units fighting the French," recalled Le Van Ban, more recently a planning cadre at the Ministry of Supply in Hanoi.

"It all happened so suddenly," he said of his departure. "Just two months before, I was recommending to my Chinese friends that they had best leave, assuming that because I was Vietnamese with a long record of service, I would have no trouble." Although Ban (another pseudonym) is Vietnamese, his wife is *Hoa*.

Equally at home in the Chinese or Vietnamese language, he had spent many years in China. "As a reward for my good showing against the French, I was sent there to study," he said proudly. "In 1953 many Vietnamese soldiers went to China to

study anti-aircraft techniques, so I was assigned to stay on as an interpreter."

But he learned to his regret that a China specialist married to a *Hoa* at the time of the Chinese invasion was no longer trusted. "On March 22, 1979, we were officially told to sell our belongings and prepare to be temporarily relocated to the countryside. The cadres cleverly characterized our leaving Hanoi in the same terms used to describe the population dispersal out of the cities during the American bombing. The implication was that once the crisis had passed, we could return. But when they tell you to turn over your apartment and sell your property, it is clear that you are never going to return."

Ban's wife had already decided to leave, but as a cadre who knew the locations of Vietnam's underground oil storage depots, he did not dare move without orders. "With that kind of knowledge, if I were caught trying to flee the country, I would have been dealt with as a traitor," he explained. He later learned that a new directive exempted *Hoa* women married to Vietnamese from the security measures, but his mind was already made up. "My family had already suffered enough, especially my children," he said.

After rummaging for a few moments in the bags and bundles which held the family's possessions, Ban produced a small book, a diary kept by his 15-year-old daughter. Its entries bear silent witness to the racial animosity which erupted after China's invasion of Vietnam. The entry of March 13, 1979:

A long time has passed, at least a month, since I last wrote in my diary. Why? Because a terrible sadness has invaded my soul.

During the day I concentrate on my school work. When I

return home, I try to sing and smile to forget that sadness. At night I gather myself together to go to sleep, but the following day it only recurs.

What am I sad about? I shall write so my diary knows. It is because war has broken out between Vietnam and China, a war which becomes more intense and violent with each day, and which upsets my heart and soul completely.

Because my mother is Chinese, there is something about me which is like the Chinese. As a result I have experienced such pain and anguish in my heart. In school my friends pick on me, saying, "Since you are Chinese, why don't you go back to China." Though I do my duties, I am confronted with so many difficulties and troubles, like having rocks thrown at me. . . .

"As children with Chinese blood, ours would have had no future had we stayed," said Mrs. Ban.

In May 1978 the Vietnamese government announced new

"When they tell you to turn over your apartment, it is clear that you are never going to return."

economic measures. While they were not specifically directed at the *Hoa*, these measures did add to their concerns about the future.

"The government announced a campaign against ill-gotten property," said Dang Kien Hoa, a 43-year-old artisan from Hanoi. "Any possessions which could not be justified by one's

official salary were theoretically subject to confiscation. The campaign was to be carried out in three stages, the first involving only about ten of the most wealthy families. In fact it was a crackdown on corruption among cadres, but we weren't sure how the latter stages might be used against us to confiscate what we had worked so hard over the years to acquire. It was a little like being told, 'You fatten the pig, but I shall slaughter it whenever I want.' Many wealthy *Hoa* fled as a result.

Nearly every conversation with *Hoa* from northern Vietnam confirmed the existence of a thriving black market which the *Hoa* ran for their own profit, but also, as they repeatedly stressed, for Vietnamese convenience. They viewed with disdain the socialist regime's impoverished cadre, some of whom, they said, were willing to look the other way for periodic gratuities.

"If you want to eat well, you must find ways to be 'resourceful,'" *Hoa* said. "In our neighborhood the families of Vietnamese cadre who lived on their government salaries alone ate only rice and vegetables without meat. You figure it out. They make 50 *dong* (\$17) a month, and a chicken costs 30 *dong* (\$10). To tell you the truth, my family ate chicken every couple of days."

Officially, *Hoa* and his family crafted plaster figurines and made \$67 a month. On the side he bought contraband tobacco from *Hoa* who lived on the China border and had it smuggled to Hanoi. "Some I sold wholesale; the rest I rolled into the best cigarettes in Hanoi," he said with satisfaction. From this he earned about \$100 more, which was "just enough to live."

La Thiet Quang, a skilled factory worker from the port city of Haiphong, is another example. Although he was, by Vietnamese standards, well paid for his work in a government machine



Refugee children in China.

Rewi Alley

tool factory, after work he operated a factory of his own at home.

"From a mold fashioned on the job and rubber bought on the black market, I produced bicycle inner tubes for sale back on the black market. If I just lived on my government salary, my family would starve. At the factory, including overtime, I earned about 120 *dong* (\$40). With a kilogram of pork costing 20 *dong* (\$6.65) and a bowl of noodle soup 2 *dong* (67 cents), how could I feed my family? If I had just one bowl of soup each morning, half my salary would be gone."

For his "extra work," as the *Hoa* termed their extralegal pursuits, he earned as much as \$335 each month.

Without doubt, the *Hoa* obtained somewhat more latitude to buy and sell on the open market by virtue of their status as foreign residents. But their relative prosperity was certainly as much a tribute to their industry and enterprise as the simple result of their prerogatives as non-citizens. However, the better life they led tended to set them apart from the Vietnamese and left them extremely vulnerable when the political climate which had sustained them suddenly vanished.

"In March and April 1979, local cadres called meetings with representatives from each *Hoa* family in Hanoi," said Dang Kien Hoa. "We were never expelled outright. We spoke of it rather as being 'cleverly chased away.' The cadre gave us two choices. We could remain in Vietnam and be relocated to the mountains, or we could leave."

China

China has taken in an estimated 260,000 refugees from Vietnam. Most are *Hoa*, though there are some ethnic Vietnamese. Most came across the land border between the two countries in 1978, though some came by boat and some have trickled in as recently as July 1979.

Rewi Alley toured a number of the areas where *Hoa* from Vietnam have been settled in southern China—particularly in Guangdong and Guangxi provinces and on Hainan island. In Guangdong he found that 105,000 refugees had been taken in at 84 state farms. They included 730 from southern Vietnam. Over 80 percent were sent to 28 farms established specifically for overseas Chinese returning from various countries. The rest were divided among the 56 farms of local Chinese.

Some of those who left Vietnam for China had been born in China, but most were natives of Vietnam. Wu Jiansing, a member of the Vietnamese Communist Party, came from a family which had lived in Vietnam's Quang Ninh province for 10 generations. He told Alley he had been forced out of his job in 1976, and found life increasingly difficult.

Others included skilled workers and technicians from factories in Haiphong, the assistant party secretary from Kien An district in Quang Ninh province, and veterans of the Viet Minh struggle against French colonialists. At a farm for overseas Chinese near the city of Quanzhou, Alley met Zhou Can:

... a sturdy, dynamic person, speaking the standard Chinese well. His father took him when a child from Guangxi to Haiphong, where he went to school. He remembers how Ho Chi Minh and Hoang Van Hoan went together to Haiphong, and visiting the school for overseas Chinese, distributed oranges and sweets amongst them, saying many good things about the work of Chinese in that port.

In 1964 he joined the Vietnamese Party of Labor, and later went to be trained as a political instructor in Hanoi, after being allocated to a school for this work. In 1972, he



Refugee child at Chinese farm.

was sent to work in an overseas Chinese school, teaching language and politics. In 1975 he was abruptly removed from this post and told to find other work, transport carrier, cart puller or whatever he could.

In 1978 he was asked to use his time writing a pamphlet justifying Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia. In April 1978 his brother came and said they must leave Vietnam, but he himself could not believe that the situation would remain this way and put off going.

He had five children, the youngest only 16 days old, when in May Vietnamese police came and ordered him out.

Zhou Can told Alley he had owned a comfortable home in Vietnam, but had not been allowed to sell it or dispose of the furniture. He and his wife now teach in the middle school at the farm where they live.

The better life *Hoa* led set them apart from the Vietnamese.

Not all of those who came to China are satisfied with the life they found there. Some never intended to stay, but saw China as a way station. Alley reports a September 1979 incident when 250 young bachelors from one Guangdong farm made their way to Hong Kong, where police rounded them up and sent them back to China.

Some 18,000 refugees have registered with Chinese authorities, saying they want to leave China for other countries, according to a July 10 report by the *New York Times*' James Sterba.

"Of the 5,000 people who have arrived by boat in Hong Kong so far this year claiming Vietnam refugee status, more than 2,000 have been rejected because they had lived in China for more than six months and were officially considered to be Chinese residents," Sterba reported.

Third countries—the United States, Australia and Canada, for example—have shown little interest in taking those who want to leave China, except for some cases where close relatives are already in that third country. The rest will probably have to make their adjustment to life on Chinese farms.

Vietnam

Vietnamese say that wholesale discrimination against the *Hoa* has never been government policy. "It is our policy to distinguish reactionaries, allies and those who are neutral," says Vo Hong Cuong, head of the Social Science Information Institute. But he says individuals can get carried away: "In normal times, people's attitudes may be very correct. But when they are focused on a particular contradiction—such as China's attack on Vietnam and the Vietnamese counterattack—people could not be as calm and objective as usual and treat everyone in accordance with the policies of the party and the state."

Asked about the schoolgirl's diary mentioned in Benoit's Hong Kong interviews, Cuong says it is quite possible that she was shut out by her former friends. He recalls a girl who studied violin with his own daughter who "had to leave" the country. "We organized a farewell party for them," he says. "It was very sad. She and my daughter were very close." Just why the family "had to leave," Cuong does not say. And putting the blame on overzealous individuals for ostracizing the *Hoa* seems inadequate. Too many refugee accounts include similar details of visits by local officials, who offered the alternative of farming in a secure part of the country or leaving.

It may well be that policies and practices have changed, though, now that the country has adjusted to the constant threat of war with China. "In our institute we have *Hoa* who have been very positive in carrying out our national policy and opposing Chinese policy," Cuong says. "We consider them the same as Vietnamese and don't treat them any differently. On

the other hand, there are some Vietnamese who have betrayed the country, and who are not considered to be as good as Vietnamese of Chinese origin."

In the South, officials were most eager to show me that many *Hoa*—including former business people as well as workers—had remained.

Tran Cao Hien is the deputy head of the people's committee in Ho Chi Minh City's fifth ward, the heart of Cholon. Before 1975 it was the heart, too, of the Chinatown trading network.

His brother said they must leave Vietnam, but he could not believe the situation would remain this way.

Hoa traders here controlled most of the legal and illegal commerce in the South. And *Hoa* factory owners turned out textiles and molded plastic goods with a labor force—mostly *Hoa*, as well—which received no favored treatment from the employers because of their common ethnic background.

Hien says the 1979 census, first since the end of the war, showed the district's population to be 190,000, some 54 percent of them *Hoa*. That percentage seems lower than in the old days, but no comparable statistics are readily available. Hien asserts that only 4,000 previous residents of the district are no longer there, and some of them may simply have left for other parts of Vietnam, rather than fleeing the country.

The reasons some left were complex, Hien says, including perplexity over which side to take in case of a war between their



Refugee children in China.

Rewi Alley



John Spragens, Jr.

Diéc Uyen Dinh, third from left, with family members and two government cadre.

present home and their ancestral homeland. "They wanted to find a place where they could make a living and stay out of politics," he says.

In addition, the economy changed after liberation, and there was no longer room for a prosperous network of private traders. "The reality of the new situation was that they could not make as much money," Hien says. "We had no other way than to base our economy on production. If not, where would the goods for trade come from? But the majority of the people were workers. In their case, things were different. If they went abroad, they would still be workers."

The traders and factory owners who stayed, Hien says, are not making as much money as they did before 1975, but they are making more in Cholon than their counterparts are anywhere else in the South. "They may eat more noodles and drink more

includes six Vietnamese and four *Hoa*. Most of the workers are young women from poor families.

Nghi pulls out the company ledger to show how wages are computed. The average monthly pay for a full-time worker has risen from less than \$25 in 1977 to nearly \$55 this year. Beginning workers receive \$1 for an eight hour day, with a raise of 15 percent or more after six months. Technical and managerial workers are paid as much as \$5 a day. Nghi points out the line for his own salary for the previous month—\$113.

There are no ethnic quotas in hiring, but relatives of co-op members are given first chance at any new job openings.

Not far away from the co-op is the home of Diéc Uyen Dinh, a 25-year-old nurse. She lives with her parents and five brothers in a fourth floor apartment on a residential side street. They are *Hoa*.

"Before liberation our situation was harder than it is now," Dinh says. Then, they were crowded into a single seven by 10 foot room, and could barely afford that. The one room apartment where they live now is about 25 feet on a side. For the past five years, they have not had to pay any rent, since the building's owners have left the country. That may change in the future, but the rent will not be high. Dinh and two brothers—one works at a noodle factory, the other at an export firm—together bring home about \$100 a month. It does not make them prosperous, but they do feel better off than before 1975. "In those days, we just worried about how to get two meals a day," she says. "Before, we worked, but we didn't get anything for it. Now we work and have something to show for it. So most of the poor people will not leave."

"They wanted to find a place where they could make a living and stay out of politics."

coffee in one morning than I could pay for with a whole month's salary," he says.

One of the post-liberation factories in the district is the Quyet Tien Cooperative. It began by making crudely forged farm tools, but recently switched to production of kerosene lamps. The manager, Do Khac Nghi, is an ethnic Vietnamese, formerly an infantryman in the revolutionary armed forces. Most of his workers—68 percent—are *Hoa*. The office staff is split 3-3. The management committee, elected by the workers,

At first Dinh seems shy. She is clearly unused to receiving foreign guests. But she gradually warms to the conversation, and speaks with a spontaneous enthusiasm about new developments in her own field of health care. From the perspective of the well-to-do, medicine in Vietnam today is worse than in 1975. But Dinh's perspective is that of the poor. For them, the costs under the old system were so high that they could not even think of going to the hospital. Now, there may be paperwork, but the state does take care of the costs.

Tieu Nguyen Huu presents a sharply different picture. Before liberation he was a merchant dealing in fishing nets. With his wife and four children, he occupies the entire top floor of a spacious apartment building he and two other families built before 1975. He is the proper host, serving black market Japanese beer over ice, but he is clearly uncomfortable about the visit, especially since I am accompanied by at least a half dozen government cadre.

"My life is normal," he says. "Prices are higher, but I can do all right." He is laconic, showing none of the enthusiasm of Dinh. Huu says he did not leave with the wave of boat people because Vietnam is his second home. "Those who left the country could not adapt themselves to socialism."

Huu adapted soon after liberation by joining a construction collective which works for the government on a contract basis, refurbishing hotels and building facilities for oil exploration crews. Why did he change so soon? "I awakened," he says, apparently reciting a well learned lesson, "Trade is exploitation. We need to shift to production." He and the two sons who

Vietnamese officials think the United States wants to provoke the flow of boat people to embarrass Vietnam.

work for the construction collective have not done badly by the standards of today's Vietnam. They may earn more than \$6.50 a day, and work five or six days each week.

The circumstances make it impossible to get a reliable idea about whether Huu really intends to stay or leave. There are, though, more than 30,000 from Cholon who do want to leave, and who have been given Vietnamese government permission to do so. They have been blocked by a combination of U.S. legal restrictions and the impasse in negotiations between the United States and Vietnam over procedures for an "orderly departure" program, though there are indications as we go to press that the situation may be improving.

The first problem is that the United States insists on interviewing every potential immigrant. Vietnam turned down a request for an American office in Ho Chi Minh City to handle the interviews because there are no diplomatic relations between the United States and Vietnam. Discussions about a compromise formula have dragged on for months, but eventually agreement is expected on a plan which will see U.S. consular officials fly into Tan Son Nhut airport in the morning, conduct as many 10-minute interviews as possible in the airport transit lounge, then fly out with the emigrants in the afternoon of the same day.

If the plan can be worked out, it will be a help for those who have immediate family in the United States, or those closely associated with the American government or private American companies in the past. But the list of 30,000-plus submitted by



John Spragens, Jr.

Hoa worker in a Cholon factory.

the Vietnamese is one of people who want to leave the country "to make a living," and this category has the lowest priority under U.S. immigration law. They stand very little chance of leaving under the legal departure program. If they do leave by boat, though, and manage to make it safely to an American ship or one of the refugee camps in other Southeast Asian countries, they should eventually make it to the United States or some other country. Countries like Malaysia and Thailand take Vietnamese refugees in only because they have been assured all the refugees will eventually be accepted by other countries.

The situation is clearly frustrating to Nguyen Van Nam, head of the Ho Chi Minh City office which deals with legal departures. "It has a very negative impact here," he says. "People ask to go legally, but other countries will not accept them. So they think, if I go illegally, it will be dangerous, but at least I'll get in." Nam and other Vietnamese officials suspect that this is exactly what the United States has in mind—to provoke a continuing flow of boat people as a way of embarrassing Vietnam in the eyes of the world. □



Refugees arrive at Travis Air Force Base, July 1979.

Reviews



Teaching the Vietnam War, by William L. Griffin and John Marciano, Allanheld, Osmun & Co. (19 Brunswick Rd., Montclair, NJ 07042), 183 pp., cloth: \$14.50, paper: \$6.50.

Perhaps it doesn't make any difference. Given the way high school history courses tend to pack everything that has happened since the end of World War II into the final frantic week of classes, maybe students will not be much influenced by what their textbooks say about the Vietnam war. That is about as optimistic as it is possible to be after reading Griffin and Marciano's study.

Although the 28 texts they reviewed do not thump the drums as enthusiastically for the Vietnam war as they do for previous American battles, they definitely do not reflect the fundamental criticisms of U.S. policy which the war provoked.

The authors look at three periods: origins of U.S. involvement; the Ngo Dinh Diem years, 1954-63; and the period of escalation, then "Vietnamization," then the end of the war. In part one, they summarize the textbook account, then offer their critique. In part two, they offer a brief alternative history of each period. In their critique, they point out:

Text after text describes the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong as "terrorists" and "aggressors." . . . The United States "intervenes" to stop "aggression." . . . The Communists "take over"; the Americans "answer the Communists' challenge." The most frequently used word in describing the military tactics of the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong is "terrorism." U.S. bombing . . . is described as "systematic," "heavy," "massive," "raining," "intensified,"

"retaliatory," "constant," or "stepped up"; but *never* as terror. (49)

Unfortunately, bookstores no longer offer much of a remedy for the shortcomings of the texts. Many of the best books on the war—among those Griffin and Marciano cite: the various editions of the *Pentagon Papers*, Frances FitzGerald's *Fire in the Lake*, and *In the Name of America*, the study commissioned by Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam—are out of print.

Teaching the Vietnam War performs a particularly useful function in recalling some of the major points raised by these books—things like the disillusionment of American troops sent, so they thought, to help and protect the people of South Vietnam. What they saw was more often like the incident Sgt. Dennis Peña described in a letter to his parents, published in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*:

What I didn't like was when we burned the village down. The women and children were crying and begging you not to burn them down. A lot of them stay inside and you have to drag them out.

Ma, that's not good to see. (139)

The authors' style is rather stuffy and not very engaging, so their book is not likely to appeal to casual readers or to most high school students. But it should be a must for history teachers, as a companion to the clearly inadequate texts they are being asked to use. More than that, *Teaching the Vietnam War* should be used as ammunition for a drive to include a better history of the war in textbooks in the first place.

The Awkward Silence, by W.D. Erhart, Northwoods Press (P.O. Box 249, Stafford, VA 22554), 41 pp., cloth: \$9.95, paper: \$2.95.

The most remarkable thing which happened in the Vietnam war was the GI revolt. In the end, it was probably this which, more than anything, forced an end to the war: the U.S. government could no longer depend on its soldiers as a reliable instrument of policy.

Three arresting anthologies of anti-war veterans' writings captured the soul of the GI revolt: the poems in *Winning Hearts and Minds* and *Demilitarized Zones* and the short stories in *Free Fire Zone*. Only *Demilitarized Zones* remains in print.

But *The Awkward Silence* reprints many of the contributions by one of the best of the GI poets. Erhart's poetry ranges from the wistful:

PERIMETER GUARD

Crouched in a corner
shivering, damp,
Gerry asleep beside me,
I stand the last
two-hour watch
of a long, tired night.
To the east,
the stars are fading:
grey appears;
then pink red, and blue.

to the cynical:

HUNTING

Sighting down the long black barrel,
I wait till front and rear sights
form a perfect line on his body,
then slowly squeeze the trigger.

The thought occurs
that I have never hunted anything in my whole life
except other men.

But I have learned by now
where such thoughts lead.
My mind passes on
to chow, and sleep
and how much longer till I change my socks.

There still is no better way to gain a sense of what the war was like than to read the searing accounts by those who were sent to fight it.

Ca Dao Vietnam, edited and translated by John Balaban, Unicorn Press (P.O. Box 3307, Greensboro, NC 27402), 87 pp., cloth: \$15, paper: \$5.

CA DAO VIETNAM



In this bilingual anthology, John Balaban introduces us to an enduring form of Vietnam's oral tradition. His account of how he collected the poems is almost as good as the verses themselves in giving a sense of the moods of daily life in the Vietnamese countryside. He also includes photographs of the singers from whom he recorded the poems. The otherwise beautifully-designed book is marred by having the Vietnamese version in typewriter type with hand-drawn accents. But both students of Vietnamese and Vietnamese expatriates will welcome the inclusion of the original texts.

The Heritage of Vietnamese Poetry, edited and translated by Huynh Sanh Thong, Yale University Press, 303 pp., cloth: \$22.50.

The gifted translator who provided the widely acclaimed English version of the Vietnamese favorite, *Tale of Kieu*, has done an equally skillful job with this anthology of shorter poems. A reader who simply wants to gain a feel for Vietnamese

traditions can spend several enjoyable hours browsing through the volume. For those who want to study Vietnamese culture more seriously, Thong has provided an informative introduction and extensive notes. An added advantage for serious students is that all Vietnamese words are properly set in Vietnamese type, not stripped of their diacritical markings, as is the usual practice. The price will put the book out of reach for many individuals. Encourage your school or public library to order it.

The Boat People, an 'Age' investigation with Bruce Grant, Penguin, 225 pp., paper: \$3.50.

This book provides the most extensive examination available the reasons "boat people" have left Vietnam, the agonies of their journey, and how they have been treated after they left. Prepared by the Melbourne newspaper, *The Age*, it looks at the problem from a largely Australian point of view. But it includes a great deal of information on how refugees have been received in other countries, particularly France and the United States.

People who are dealing with refugees now should find this book a useful compendium of background information. It would be good if sponsors come to share the concluding sentiments of the book's authors:

In 1945, millions of refugees left the new communist countries of Europe . . . Some of them, now citizens of other countries, return occasionally for holidays . . . It is the hope of this book that the boat people will have the same prospect, and may be able to return to Vietnam one day.

Health Care for the People: Studies from Vietnam, by Dr. Joan McMichael, Alyson Publications (75 Kneeland St., Suite 309, Boston, MA 02111), 341 pp., paper: \$6.95 (\$7.50 postpaid if ordered by mail).

Despite the bombings and privations of war, North Vietnam developed a health care system which earned the praise of the World Health Organization. Dr. Joan McMichael, of the British Medical Aid Committee for Vietnam, worked in Vietnam during those years, and has put together a valuable account of the Vietnamese health care system. This is the first American edition of the book, previously published in Britain. We can hope that someone will soon provide a sequel covering developments in Vietnamese medicine since the end of the war.

Vietnamese Anticolonialism, by David G. Marr, University of California Press, cloth: \$20, paper: \$8.95.

This valuable introduction to the intellectual history of Vietnam from 1885 to 1925 was reprinted this fall. It remains the best English-language attempt to understand the intellectual debates which fueled the Vietnamese independence struggle. Those who missed the chance to buy a copy when it was first published in 1971 will want to grab one now. A second book, covering the period through 1945, will be coming soon from UC Press.

Rolling Thunder: Understanding Policy and Program Failure, by James Clay Thompson, University of North Carolina Press, 199 pp., cloth: \$14, paper: \$6.50.

Hidden away in the dense, distant prose of a management study are some revealing gems about the conduct of the U.S. bombing campaign against North Vietnam. This, for example: "Armed reconnaissance involves striking targets of opportunity as they become available. But when 'significant' targets are not available, 'insignificant' targets may be attacked . . . the fact that most of the sorties flown over North Vietnam were of the armed reconnaissance variety does indicate that there were few fixed targets that were deemed important." (92) This is not a book for everyone's bookshelf, but libraries will find it a useful addition to a good Vietnam collection.

To Stand Against the Wind, by Ann Nolan Clark, Viking Press, 132 pp., cloth: \$7.95.

To Stand Against the Wind

ANN NOLAN CLARK



This short novel by a highly respected writer of children's books provokes a contradictory response. As a humanistic account of the horrors of the American war in Vietnam and how it destroyed a family's way of life, the book is excellent: beautifully written and deeply moving. It also offers a sensitive portrayal of Vietnamese culture and evokes the difficulty of adjusting to American life in ways which may help adolescent and older readers to regard Vietnamese immigrants with more sympathy and respect.

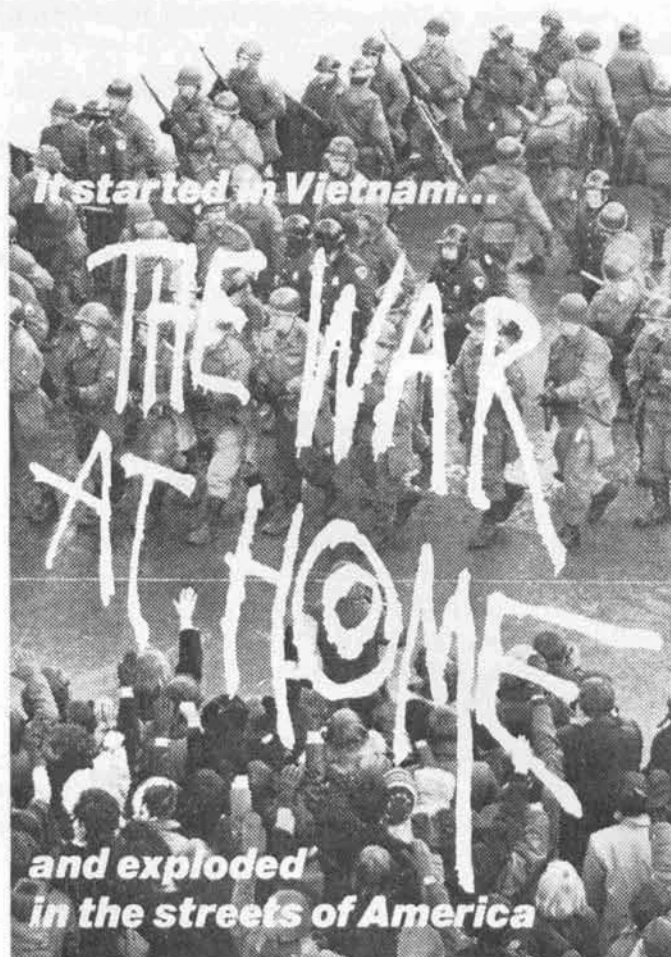
However, Clark's brief effort to offer an explanation of the war is meaningless, and her chronology appears to be quite garbled. The Liberation forces do not act in this story. They appear rather as a mysterious army of "others" who are unaccountably everywhere and whose presence draws hideous destruction from the Americans. The family supports the South Vietnamese government, willingly sending both father and son to serve the military, but no reason is offered for this choice. Clark's stress on traditional rural life leads her to depict Vietnamese peasants as unable and unwilling to comprehend the events and forces which are tearing their life apart. She herself seems equally uncomprehending. The family becomes very real; their tragedy is devastating but inexplicable. This book should be used with care.

The War at Home, directed by Glenn Silber and Barry Alexander Brown, available from New Front Films, 1409 Willow St., Suite 505, Minneapolis, MN 55404, color/black and white, 100 min., 16mm sale: \$1,385, 16mm rental: \$350 (classroom: \$175), 35mm rental: \$500.

With the University of Wisconsin as a microcosm, this film traces the growth and the impact of the movement in the streets of America against the war in Vietnam. Interviews with leading figures in the movement and news footage capture the mood of rising anger and the occasional sense of success within the movement. And the cause of it all is never forgotten. The campaigning Nixon promises he will never expand the war to the other countries of Indochina, then the news cameras show American troops invading Kampuchea, at Nixon's order. The film is gripping and thoughtful and reminds us that we can organize ourselves to change government policy when we work at it.

Vietnam: An American Journey, directed by Robert Richter, available from Films Incorporated, 733 Green Bay Road, Wilmette, IL 60091, color, 85 min., 16mm sale: \$950, 16mm rent: \$125, videocassette sale: \$570.

Richter's 1978 film provides a warm portrait of the Vietnamese people and a sharp reminder of the devastation they faced as they began to rebuild their country. Besides footage of people at work and play along Highway 1 linking North and South, Richter shows newsreel clips of the war itself. He includes his own moving interview with a woman who survived the My Lai massacre because she had fallen beneath the bodies of family and friends. And he points out the Vietnamese openness to trade and diplomatic relations with the United States. For an extra fee, Richter will travel with the film to answer questions from the audience. □



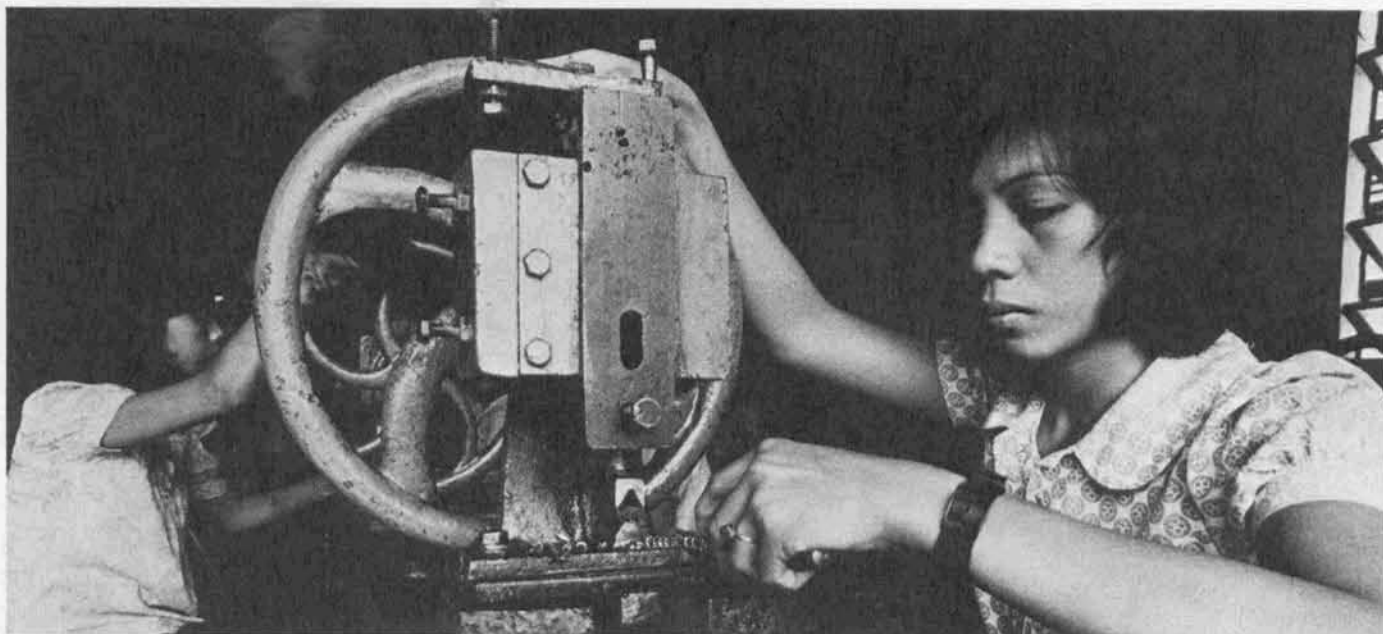
Survivor of the My Lai massacre, from Vietnam: An American Journey.

Films Incorporated



John Spragens, Jr.

Kerosene lamp factory in Ho Chi Minh City.



John Spragens, Jr.

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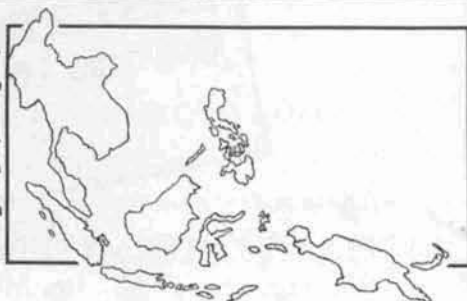
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